

Arizona

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Deadwood Dick, Jr., in Silver Pocket;



OR, THE Gambler Queen's High Stake.

BY ED. L. WHEELER,
AUTHOR OF "DEADWOOD DICK" NOVELS, ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A DOUBLE HOLD-UP.

In the mountains that lie between Tucson and Prescott, Arizona, a lone horseman was threading his way along a narrow and dangerous ledge-trail.

He was a young man, maybe twenty-four

LIKE A FLASH EACH HAD DRAWN A REVOLVER.

years of age, and was rather fancifully attired in semi-Mexican garb. He had a mustache, and his dark hair was long and rested upon his shoulders.

Mounted upon a superb horse, he looked the perfect horseman. Spurs were upon the heels of his fine boots, and his short trousers were buckled at the knees. The outside seams of the trousers, as well as the sleeves and borders of his jacket, were trimmed with numerous buttons.

His hat was a semi-sombrero, and a fancy white flannel shirt and a bright sash completed his raiment.

He was well armed, and seemed to be at home in that wild region.

Jagged walls of rock towered up on either side to dizzy heights, at his feet yawned a horrible chasm, and the scenery was of the most wild and rugged type.

The young man was riding in a seemingly careless manner, allowing his horse to pick its own way while he was evidently buried in thought. One hand rested on his thigh, and the other loosely held the rein.

Suddenly, rounding an abrupt projection, he came face to face with another horseman.

This second horseman was a rough-looking fellow, forty years of age at a guess, roughly clad and mounted upon a big horse. He, too, was well armed.

The horse of the younger man halted easily, pawed with one foot, while that of other stopped suddenly, with something of a recoil, and stood excited and snorting.

Much quicker than their horses, however, had been the actions of the two men, for like a flash each had drawn a revolver at sight.

The older man looked fierce and frowning, while the lips of the younger parted in a smile.

"Good-morning, neighbor!" the latter greeted.

"Et's goin' ter be a mighty bad mornin', fer you, Yuma Dodd," was the growled response.

"That so?" cheerily.

"You kin bet your hat et air! I know ye, my dandy."

"You may think you do, but I doubt it, my friend. I certainly don't know you, anyhow."

"Well, you will know me before ye git done with me, mebbly. Put up yer gun, now, 'fore I bore ye oncet fer luck. I have got a straight squint on yer heart, an' ef ye so much as twitch a muscle I'll plug ye."

"Why, I've got my gun up, don't you see?" cried the other, laughing. "I am probably as soon on the shoot as you are, and this game is about as broad for me as it is long for you. Two can play at it right handy. But, suppose we get better acquainted before we open fire."

"I know ye well enough as it is, dang ye."

"I beg leave to differ, pardner."

"You mean ter say you ain't Yuma Dodd?"

"Exactly."

"Wal, I say you'm a dod blamed liar, that's all; an' what ar' ye goin' ter do about et?"

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed the other, in a merry, ringing voice. "That's about as good a pun as I've heard in a dog's age, neighbor. Yuma Dodd, blamed liar. Ha! ha!"

While he laughed, though, he did not for a second remove his eyes from the other's face.

"Will ye surrender?" cried the older man, getting mad.

"Well, hardly, neighbor," was the easy response. "And, by the way, take care not to crook your finger any more, or my gun is bound to go off. Who are you, anyhow, and where are you going?"

"I'm Bob Scott, the genuine original Great Scott you've heard about, and I'm a man that's all sand. I'm a citizen of the

camp of Silver Pocket, where every man wears whiskers, and has got ha'r on his breast. Now, then, put up that 'ar gun, or I'm goin' ter shoot."

"Don't be too rash about your shootin', my friend. Maybe I'm as quick at that sort of thing as you are. You have called me Yuma Dodd, but you are a long ways off the trail. Who is this man Dodd?"

"Do ye still 'sist that you ain't him?"

"That's what I do. Never heard of him."

"Then who in the name o' tarnation ar' ye, youngster?"

"That's a fair question, seeing that you have introduced yourself. I am called Deadwood Dick, Junior."

"What?"

"You heard what I said."

"Yas, but you don't mean ter tell me you ar' the great Deadwood Dick!"

"Well, I haven't any certificate of my greatness, Mr. Scott, but I am Deadwood Dick, Junior, hard and fast enough."

"Kin ye prove et?"

"Maybe not, here and now, but I give you my word for it."

"Well, I'm blowed. I took ye to be Yuma Dodd, and I can't swear fer certain that ye ain't."

"If you can't, I can, my friend. And now that we seem to be coming to an understanding, who is this Yuma Dodd you speak about?"

"Who is Yuma Dodd? Why, he's the p'izenest cut-throat outside of the Arizona Penitentiary, that I'll swear, and he's the man I'm gunnin' for, you bet! But, whar do you come from?"

"From Tucson."

"And where goin'?"

"Prescott."

"Well, ef you are the man ye claim to be, you ar' wanted at the camp of Silver Pocket."

"That so?"

"Et is."

"What's wanted of me there?"

"Thar has been a mysterious crime done, an' I was on my way now to Tucson to fetch ye, as we had heard that you was thar. Ted Talbot, Mayor of Silver Pocket, sent me."

"Put away your popper, then, for you have no further use for it."

"You put away yourn first, to prove that you are what ye claim ter be. I mean ye fair, pardner."

Deadwood Dick lowered his weapon and thrust it into his sash.

"I'm satisfied," declared Mr. Scott, dropping his own aim and returning his gun to his belt. "Ef you was Yuma Dodd, you would never give me that 'vantage over ye, so ye must be Deadwood Dick."

"That is just who I am, Mr. Scott."

"Now, how about gettin' out of this hyer fix o' diffikilty?"

"One of us will have to back till we come to a place wide enough to pass or turn."

"Then I'll be the one, for thar is sech a place about a hundred feet or so, back hyer. In your direction I know thar ain't a break fer a quarter of a mile at the least kalkylashun."

"You are right, sir."

The self-denominated Great Scott slipped out of the saddle on the side nearest the wall, and taking his horse by the bit, made the animal back.

Dick followed up as fast as the way was cleared for him, and finally a place was reached where the ledge was several feet wide, and there Scott had no difficulty in turning.

"That's a durnashion bad place to meet a man," he declared.

"I agree with you," Dick assented.

"Met a red-skin there one day—his bones ar' down thar in the fissure, 'long with his hoss."

The whiskered man now leaped again into the saddle.

"Well, lead the way to your camp, Mr. Scott," Dick invited him. "If I am in demand there, I'll go."

"That's what I'll do, an' Ted Talbot will be glad to see you so soon, I kalkylate."

"What is the mysterious crime of which you have made mention?"

"That's what you ar' wanted to find out."

"You don't mean to say you do not know what the crime is? That seems out of reason."

"What I do mean, then, is that we can't tell jest whether it was suericide or murder. The fact of the business is, Henry Wilkinson is deader'n a smoked herring, an' we want the mystery cleared up."

Deadwood Dick gave a start, and then plied the man with questions, learning all he could about the matter.

When he had heard all, he decided that it had been a murder, though that was yet an open question at the camp.

In a couple of hours they rode into the camp of Silver Pocket, where all work was at a standstill and where the whole population was gathered in the single street, discussing the mystery.

CHAPTER II.

CONCERNING A MYSTERY.

SILVER POCKET was a mining-camp of the usual type, neither better nor worse than many another of its kind.

It had its shebangs, shanties and "stick-ups;" and had, besides, some buildings that were a little better than the average, as such camps go.

One of these was a hotel, known as the Spread Eagle, and another was the Silver Pocket Exchange, a sort of banking institution where dust and nuggets could be turned into cash.

This concern had been owned and managed by one Henry Wilkinson.

The banking room was on the ground floor; where also was the Express Office, while the floor above was fitted up as a gaming parlor.

The latter was known as the Monte Carlo, and was patronized by the best class of denizens the camp could boast. It was an open secret that Wilkinson was the power back of the bank.

The room was presided over by one Fairy Frank, so called.

She was a handsome, petite young woman, with a pair of matchless eyes, but had a heart as cold as ice, as was said of her.

Apparently, the gaming-room was her own, and she and Wilkinson met as mere business acquaintances, the same as she met every one else who came into her parlor for the purpose of gaming.

She had lovers many, in the camp. All the citizens were her admirers, and if there was one who was favored more than another in her esteem, no man could say who that one was. She treated all alike, and all in the same cold and business-like manner.

The Silver Pocket Exchange and the Spread Eagle Hotel stood opposite to each other, and marked the center of the camp.

There were other hotels, of a lesser grade, and several saloons, all as near the center of the town as they could crowd, to say nothing of a store or two, and other concerns.

It was here, in the center, that the crowd was congregated when Deadwood Dick and Great Scott rode into the camp.

"Hillo!" bellowed one man, "hyer is Great Scott, back again a'ready."

"So et ar'," chimed in another.

"An' who's ther sport with him?"

"Et can't be the man he went fer; he ain't had time ter go no furdur'n the hills an' back."

"Mebby et is Yuma Dodd he has rounded up an' run in. Ef et is, by ther great sandy

Nowhar but thar will be a hancin' hyerin about two holy minutes!"

"Bet yer life on't!"

"But, et ain't him, pards, or ef it is he ain't no prisoner."

"What's ther rumpus hyer?"

This was demanded by a man who just then made his appearance from the interior of the hotel.

His attention was directed to the approaching horsemen, who were now at hand.

"Not Great Scott?" he cried.

"The same, Ted Talbot," was the response of that worthy himself. "And hyer is ther man I went to fetch."

"Deadwood Dick, Junior?"

"Zackly."

Dick himself inclined his head in the affirmative, giving a wave of salute with his right hand.

"Ther durnation!" exclaimed in whisper the man who had first espied them. "I tell ye he's a sparkler, pards, no mistake."

And the "pards" agreed that he was.

"Do I address the mayor of this camp?" Dick asked.

"That's me," Ted Talbot acknowledged.

"I understand that you sent this man for me."

"That's straight."

"Well, here I am. I was on my way from Tucson to Prescott, and met your man in the hills. He held me up in fine style, taking me for Yuma Dodd, and I didn't know but what I would get a dose of lead. However, he gave me a chance to explain, and here we are."

"Durn small chance I had ter bore ye, without gettin' et myself," Great Scott muttered.

"Don't mention that," said Dick.

"Wull, you ar' the man we want to see," declared Mayor Talbot. "Dismount, an' some of ther boys will care for your critter."

Dick slipped out of the saddle and gave the rein to the nearest man.

Scott, too, dismounted.

"Give that hoss the best of care," the mayor directed. "Come right in hyer, Mr. Deadwood Dick, an' we'll have a chat about this."

"I am with you, sir. There seems to be a good deal of excitement in your town. This is a case of murder, your man tells me. He has told me something about it, but I'll hear it from you."

"Mebbe et was murder, an' mebbly et wasn't."

"Then there is a doubt about it?"

"Thar is."

"This man Wilkinson was proprietor of the Silver Pocket Exchange, just over the way."

"Yes."

"And he was found dead in his bed this morning."

"Right."

"Had been killed with a knife, or had killed himself with it, and that is the unsettled question."

"Exactly."

"His hand was on the hilt of the knife, an' the doors of his room were secured on the inside, so that you had to break in to learn what was the matter."

"You have got et."

"Well, first, is there any known reason why he should take his own life?"

"Not a darn one, far as we kin see. On t'other hand there was the best of reasons why he should live."

"Then, next, is there any suspicion against any one? Is there any one who has profited by his death, or will profit by it, far as you know? Had he any foe that would do the deed?"

"Ther same to that. He hadn't a single foe, that anybody knows of, and every man in the camp was his friend."

"And that is one reason why the excitement is so great."

"Exactly. That's the reason we sent right off for you. We are bound to sift this thing to the bottom ef et kin be done."

"Well, give me the particulars in your own way."

"Easy done. This mornin' the bank wasn't opened at the usual time, and the Express agent wanted to get in to open up his office. You see Wilkinson had a room at the back of the main room."

"And the Express agent had no key?"

"No."

"That was a queer arrangement, wasn't it?"

"It was Wilkinson's rule. He had only one key to the big front door, and he kept that himself. He was always up before the time to open the Express Office anyhow, so et made no difference."

"And what did he do?"

"Why, he waited around for a time, and then he went back to the rear door an' tried to get Wilkinson out. Findin' he couldn't, he knowed that somethin' was wrong and kem an' fetched me in a hurry. We got together three or four reliable men, an' bu'sted in ther door."

"And you found Wilkinson dead?"

"Dead as a rock. He was on the bed, with a bowie in his breast, and his right hand gripped on the handle."

"Did it look as if he had struck the blow himself?"

"Et did that same. But, you kin see, fer the body ain't been tetched. We thought we'd leave et jest as et was till you came, if we could find you."

"The deuce. That would have been forty-eight hours, had your man gone all the way to Tucson, and had he found me promptly, upon which you could not count. What was your idea in that?"

"Et ought to be plain enough. We had heard about you, and that you was at Tucson, and et struck us if we could get holt o' you to sift this mystery it would be the right thing ter do. Then if we could get you quick, it would be better to let you see et with your own eyes."

"Well, as it has turned out, I am glad of it. Let's go and take a look over the ground."

"Jest what we want you to do."

They left the hotel and went immediately to the scene of the murder—if a murder it had been—other men joining them, and the crowd surging eagerly around.

CHAPTER III.

PROVING IT ANOTHER'S CRIME.

By this time Great Scott had disposed of his horse.

He was one of the men who joined Dick and the mayor, and another was Pat Griffin, the Express agent.

This man was introduced to Deadwood Dick, who took a careful survey of the fellow as he shook hands with him, as if he would read whatever secrets he might possess.

Griffin was an Irishman, as his name indicated, with a frank, open face and a pair of fearless blue eyes.

Dick pronounced him innocent at sight.

Another who joined them was Timothy McFarrel, likewise an Irishman, and proprietor of the Spread Eagle.

Ted Talbot led the way to the rear of the Silver Pocket Exchange, where the broken door had been set up in place, and where a couple of armed men stood guard.

"Here is Deadwood Dick, boys," the mayor announced. "Got him a good deal sooner than we expected. We'll go in, but you hold the crowd back, for he won't be able to do anything with a room full."

"That is the right thing," assented Dick.

"Three or four are a plenty; you do the choosing."

"Well, you, Pat, and you, Tim McFar-

rel, and you, Scott; that will be enough. The rest will be informed of what's discovered, so have patience, boys."

"An' death ter ther man what killed Henry Wilkinson!" cried one of the crowd.

"You kin bet your life on't!" yelled another. "He was a white man clear to the ground."

"You can see what the feeling is, sir," spoke the mayor. "Let the murderer be discovered, if it was a murder, and he will get a quick send-off."

"I have no doubt of it, sir."

The door was lifted out of place, and they stepped into the room.

It was a room of fair size, having two windows and two doors, one of the latter leading into the banking office.

A window was on each side of the room, with iron bars placed across so as to make it impossible for any one to gain access in that direction. These windows were fastened besides.

There were curtains, which were now down.

"Have these curtains been raised?" asked Dick.

"That one has," answered the mayor, indicating which one.

Dick raised it again, and a flood of light fell in on the bed just opposite.

Taking a look at the window, noting what had just been said of it, the detective turned to the bed on which the victim lay, where he had been first discovered.

He was a man apparently forty years of age.

Of good figure, he had been rather good-looking than otherwise, in life.

His close-cropped hair was of iron-gray color, and he had a mustache that was just slightly silvered.

He was undressed, and was lying on his back with one leg hanging over the side of the bed, the foot touching the floor.

In his breast was buried a heavy knife, but now his hand did not grasp it, as it had when first discovered, but was lying across his breast a few inches distant.

"This is the way he was found?" asked Dick.

"Just the way, 'cept that his hand had holt of the knife, which et hasn't now, as ye see."

"The others present saw that?"

"We did."

Dick made no comments, but looked carefully around, observing everything.

The others watched his every movement with deep interest.

"Do you think it was suicide?" asked the mayor, presently. "Or do you agree with us that it was more likely a murder?"

"You said you didn't know which it could be."

"That's the fact. We don't know of any reason why he should 'a' killed himself, an' at the same time we don't see how anybody could get in hyer to murder him. It is a blank mystery."

"The doors and windows were fastened same as now?"

"Jest ther same."

"Then it must have been suicide, one would think. Seems like a plain case don't it?"

"But, where's the motive?"

"That's the mystery of it."

"And a deep one, too. Then, if it was murder, how did the assassin get in and out again?"

"That's another mystery."

"And that's jest what we wanted of you. We want to know the truth of this business, Deadwood Dick, and we expect, o' course, that you kin git at the bottom of it."

"I'll try to, Mr. Talbot."

Dick noticed that the mayor did not use the same language all the time.

At times he used a broad dialect, and then, again, his language was fairly good.

This might or might not signify for or against him, for it might be natural or assumed. It is easy for one to drop into the ways of doing as Romans do, as Dick was well aware.

Dick was silent again.

"Well, what d'ye find?" the mayor asked.

"Nothing," Dick answered. "It is one of those peculiar cases that baffle, at first."

"We hoped that you would be able to get right at the bottom of it, Deadwood Dick, from what we had heard about you and your ability as a detective."

"You must give me time."

"Wull, we expect ter do that. Not ter be supposed you could clear it up in a minute. But, the more I think about it the more I think it must 'a' been murder."

"And why?"

"'Cause Henry Wilkinson hadn't no reason ter take his own life. He was well fixed, happy as a lark, an' hadn't a foe in the world so far as we kin tell. What do ye s'pose would lead him to kill himself?"

"I am inclined to agree with you, Mr. Talbot, that it was murder."

"Then, how did the murderer get in an' out again?"

"That remains to be discovered. That knife was never driven where it is by his own hand, that is evident to me."

"Glad to hear et. Now, all you have got ter do is to p'int out the man to us, and we'll do the rest. Show us the murderer of Henry Wilkinson, is all we ask of ye."

"That's what's the matter."

It was, evidently, the one thing they desired.

"How do you know he did not do it himself?" asked Pat Griffin, with only a slight brogue.

"The direction of the blade indicates it," Dick argued. "Had he done it himself, the slant would be the other way."

"There may be somethin' in that," mused Talbot.

"Then, too, the back of the knife is the wrong way," Dick called attention. "When a man grips a knife and means business, the back of the blade is always away from his body."

"That's so, by mighty!" cried Great Scott.

"So, you see," continued Dick, "the man who did the deed stood just about here," indicating, "and struck the deadly blow in about this manner."

He lifted his arm, as he spoke, to show clearly his meaning, and bringing it down again, his hand came naturally over the hilt of the bowie, and any one looking at him might suppose he had just driven the knife home.

Instantly he straightened up again, looking the men in the face.

"Do you agree with me?" he demanded.

"We can't help agreein' with ye," answered Pat Griffin.

"But, how came the murderer in, and how did he get out again?" urged the mayor.

"Only careful investigation can answer that," answered Dick. "Since you have placed the matter in my hands, I will make that investigation and see what can be done."

At that moment he stooped and picked up something from the floor near the post of the bed, and turning immediately to Pat Griffin, held the object against his coat, where a button was wanting.

The object in question was the missing button!

CHAPTER IV.

THE SECRET OF A SECRET DOOR.

"WHAT are you doing?" Griffin immediately asked.

"When did you lose this button?" demanded Deadwood Dick, severely.

"What button?"

Pat looked in haste, and immediately added:

"I did not know I had lost a button, sir. Do you mean to say you found it here on this floor?"

"You saw me pick it up," said Dick.

"I know not how it came here."

"The man's face was pale, and he looked at Ted Talbot and Great Scott in a helpless manner."

"What's the meanin' of this, Pat?" the mayor questioned.

"That is more'n I know, Talbot," was the answer. "I hope I am not going to be suspected of this horrible crime."

"Nonsense!" the mayor cried. "Who can suspect you? But, it is deuced queer how this button from your coat came here. Can't you explain that, Pat?"

"I can't, mayor."

"How did you know so quick it was Pat that had lost the button?" demanded Bob Scott, turning upon Deadwood Dick.

"I had been using my eyes," was answered, "and the moment I saw the button I knew where it belonged."

"You are sharp."

"Oh, no; I merely observe things, that is all. I noticed that a button was missing on this man's coat, the same as I have noticed that you have lost one of your boot-straps, and the mayor here lacks a button on one sleeve."

Both the mayor and Great Scott gave a start.

"I guess it was all straight, all that we have heard of you," the mayor remarked. "If anybody can unravel this mystery, I guess you are the man to do it, Deadwood Dick."

"I hope to be able to do it, sir, with your help."

"And that you shall have."

"And mine, too," assured Great Scott.

"I am ready to give mine, if suspicion is not going to fall on me," added the Express agent, in a diffident manner.

"No one has said that you are suspected, yet, my man," encouraged Dick. "If you are able to help me any, I'll be glad of your assistance. Well, this seems about all I can do here."

"Don't mean to say you are done, do ye?" exclaimed the mayor.

"Yes; done for this particular occasion."

"Why, ye ain't been hyer two minutes."

"Plenty long enough for my purpose, sir. You may admit the crowd and have the body cared for."

"Wull, I'm darned if you ain't lightnin'!" cried Great Scott. "Didn't s'pose ye had seen half thar was to be seen hyer."

"Can you call my attention to anything I haven't observed?"

"No, I opine not."

"Or you, mayor?"

"Not a thing."

"Then let us return to the hotel."

And leaving Timothy McFarrell to take charge of the "chamber of death," they repaired to the hotel.

When they mounted to the piazza a man stepped forward and spoke to Dick.

"You are Deadwood Dick?" he asked.

"Yes."

"What's wanted, Tom?" demanded the mayor.

"Fairy Frank would like to see this gentleman, immediately, that's all," was the answer.

"I am at her service," acquiesced Dick, promptly.

"Then come with me."

Dick following the man, was conducted to the second floor of the hotel, and to the door of a front room.

There he knocked.

"Come in!" a gentle voice responded.

The man opened the door, and allowed Dick to enter.

"The gentleman you desired me to bring, Fairy Frank," he said, and he closed the door.

Dick was left alone with the young woman.

"You desired to see me?" Dick asked.

"Yes. Please be seated. You are Deadwood Dick, the detective?"

"The same."

"Then you are the person I am looking for. The mayor sent for you to take hold of this murder mystery?"

"He did."

"What do you think of it?"

"That it was a murder, and not a suicide."

"I am glad you think that. I am sure my father was no suicide."

"Your father?" in some astonishment.

"Yes; he was that."

"This is news. I guess no one here knows of this relationship, or I should have heard of it."

"It has been kept a secret, sir. Father thought it might hurt the business, if it were made known. He preferred to have me something of a mysterious personage, you see."

"Why do you tell me this?"

"That you may have a full understanding of the situation, sir."

Dick looked hard at the young woman.

"Are you not going to make your relationship publicly known, now that there is no longer need of secrecy?" he asked.

"That is what I wanted to ask you about, sir."

"Have you seen your father?"

"Not yet."

"Why?"

"I knew I could not bear up, and that would be to let my secret out. What ought I to do?"

"Why, you ought to declare yourself as Henry Wilkinson's daughter, and take charge of the arrangements, as well as the business, certainly."

"Then that is what I will do."

"That was all you wanted of me?"

"Oh, no; I want to ask you what about the mystery. Have you found any clue to the crime?"

"Not yet, but I have my eyes and ears wide open for anything that may develop."

"And is it true that his room was so securely locked on the inside?"

"Yes, so it appears."

"How, then, could any one get in, and out again, leaving the doors and windows secured?"

"I do not know, yet."

"Shall I tell you?"

"Do you know?"

"I think I do."

"How?"

"By a secret door."

"I suspected something of the sort. Meant to look when I could get into the room alone. What do you know about the secret door?"

"I know all about it, seeing that my father explained it to me. I have many times used it, to visit him secretly in his room, after closing the games in the rooms overhead."

"Why have you not mentioned it, then?"

"I heard they had sent for you, and wanted to keep the information for your ears."

"For which I am obliged."

"Then, too, I was afraid they would suspect me of the crime."

"A good reason for your silence, then, truly. But, what about this door you mention?"

"It is at the head of the bed, and leads into the hall, under the stairs."

"Why, I understood there was no hall. Does not the stair take up the whole space where the hall would naturally be? How, then, does the secret door lead out of the building?"

Before the girl could respond, there was a great shout in the street, and Dick sprung to the window to learn what it was all about.

CHAPTER V.

THE STRANGERS. THE STAGE.

Two new-comers had just arrived in camp.

These two men mounted upon a pair of mules, and it was hard to say which were the worse looking, the animals or the men.

One of the latter was a homely individual, with a scraggy beard, and upon his left shoulder was perched a parrot. The other was arrayed in rags, and his nose told for a hard drinker.

The crowd had espied these before they reached the center of the camp, and everybody was looking as they came up.

When they arrived, something the parrot said caused the shout.

"Set 'em up again!" cried the bird. "Polly want whisk! Polly want booze."

At which the crowd fairly howled.

Here was something decidedly new and novel, for them, and the rough denizens enjoyed it to the full.

"Three yaups and a yowler!" cried the parrot. "Whoop 'er up again, boys!"

Pete Parrot was one of the strangers, and the other traveler's name happened also to be Pete.

It was evident that Peter Parrot had been drilling Polly, and adding to her vocabulary.

"Polly, shut your head!" her master ordered, severely.

"Pete, dry up!" the bird retorted, promptly.

And in spite of the fact that the camp was in mourning, the crowd whooped and yelled in wild delight.

"Is et a bird, or the devil?" cried one man.

"Et ar' both," another responded.

"No, it's only a bird," informed Pete Parrot, "but it is the durndest bird you ever seen in your days. Can't keep it still unless the guzzle is in sight."

"What! Does the bird drink?"

"Does it drink! Bless your soul, it wouldn't do anything else if I'd let her."

"Set 'em up again!" yelled the parrot. "Polly want booze! Trot out the Blue Grass, boys!"

It could hardly be believed that the words came from the parrot, yet it was too plain to be doubted.

The merriment was beginning to subside, now.

"Who are you, strangers?" asked Great Scott, pushing to the fore.

"That's a proper question," answered Pete. "My name is Pete Parrot, and my pard's cognomen is Pete Bourbon."

"That's the stuff!" cried Polly. "Bourbon—Blue Grass!"

The other Pete, he in rags, bowed his acknowledgment of the introduction to the crowd.

"See here, Polly," cried Pete Parrot, "we have heard enough out of you for the present. I think I'll put you to bed for a spell."

He grabbed the bird off his shoulder as he spoke, and doubling it up, thrust it down into one of the capacious pockets of his coat, where the bird's stifled voice was heard in complaint.

"Now mebbly I'll git a chance," spoke up Peter Bourbon, speaking for the first time. "Et ain't no use fer me to open my bazoo when that bird is on deck, and if I utter a word of complaint, Pete Parrot takes the bird's part every time."

"That's what's the matter! Let us lubricate, boys!" cried Polly, having worked her head out of Pete's pocket.

"All in favor of that motion," continued Bourbon, "please signerfy by shoutin' You

bet! If any man is opposed, let him hold his peace forever."

"You bet!" yelled Polly. "You bet! you bet! you—"

"You git in thar, I tell ye!" cried Pete, taking her by the neck and forcing her down again.

"It is carried!" shouted Bourbon Pete. "Let us adjourn to the bar!"

"At your expense," broke in some one in the crowd.

"Great Scott!" gasped the man in rags. "Do ye—"

"Don't you take my name in vain," here roared Great Scott, the "original," as he shook his fist in warning.

"Great Scott! is—"

"Do et jest once more, blast ye, an' I'll lam ye clear over into the middle of next week. Great Scott is my true name, and I am goin' to 'fend et while I have breath in my body."

"Is that your name, sure enough?" Peter Bourbon gasped.

"Yes, that is my name, sure enough, and don't you forget it," Scott assured and gave warning.

"Then dang my patches, ef I don't think you'd orter treat!"

"Why should I treat?"

"Havin' the most peculiar and at ther same time ther most popular name on this hyer footstool."

The laugh was on Great Scott.

"If it is any more peculiar or any more popular than your own, I'll eat my hat," he fired back, however, to get even.

"As to it's bein' popular, I'll answer fer that. But, what do ye say, will ye set 'em up?"

"Set 'em up again!" chimed in Polly once more.

Pete Parrot cut the bird short, however, and crammed her down into his pocket again.

"That's right, Pete," said the other Peter. "Keep that bird still while I have the floor. If ther whisk flows, then she shall have a share."

"But, we are not treating strangers," protested Great Scott.

"What did I tell ye, fool?" cried Pete Parrot.

"Don't you fool me, Pete Parrot!"

"I'll do wuss'n fool ye, if I have to, Bourbon!"

The two shook their fists at each other, and even if they were pards, there was, nevertheless, danger that they would come to blows.

In the mean time, Deadwood Dick and Fairy Frank were taking it in from the window of the gambler queen's room.

The window was partly open, so they could plainly hear all that was said.

"What droll fellows!" the girl cried.

"About the greatest pair of bums I ever saw," declared Dick.

"And that parrot—"

"I have an idea one of the men must be able to throw his voice. I never knew a bird to talk like that."

"Oh, no; it was really the bird, for I was looking at its mouth that time. Don't you see? It is talking again now, and there can be no mistake."

"Well, as you were saying, Miss Fairy?"

"Call me simply Fairy Frank. By that name I am known to all—unless to you I am Miss Wilkinson."

"Your pardon. For the moment I had forgotten your real name. But, as you were about to say—"

"Wait. Let us hear what more these droll fellows have to say. How the people are laughing at them!"

"And your father lying dead!" the detective reminded.

The girl's face became sober immediately.

"How could I forget, for that moment?" she demanded, as if of her own heart.

"Poor papa! Let us close the window, Mr. Deadwood Dick."

"In a moment. I am interested myself, now."

He listened, but what more was said, until the last remark from Pete Parrot.

It certainly looked as if they would come to fisticuffs; but, just at that moment, there came an interruption.

Some one announced that the stage was coming, and every eye was turned in the direction from which it was looked for, and the report was verified. The stage was rolling into camp, in a cloud of dust.

CHAPTER VI.

EXCITEMENT TENFOLD INCREASED.

No matter what is going on in your mining-camp, the coming of the stage creates a new interest of first importance.

So it was in this instance. All attention was turned upon the coming coach, and the two Petes were partly forgotten at least, and they lapsed into silence.

The "hearse" came on with its rattle and sway, and the driver drew up before the Spread Eagle with his usual flourish, his six mules obeying the touch of the hand upon the "ribbons."

"Hyar we be!" the Jehu bellowed.

"And glad to git hyer, you kin bet!" exclaimed a man on top.

"Is thar a place hyer where a thirsty pilgrim kin liquidate?" demanded another.

He was promptly assured that there was.

So they remarked, as they tumbled down from their lofty perch, where they had been obliged to cling for life at times during the ride.

The door of the stage had opened, meanwhile, and a woman was getting out, a woman of plain face and modest dress—a personage maybe forty years of age, certainly no younger.

"Is Mr. Henry Wilkinson here, gentlemen?" she made inquiry.

No one could make reply, while every man looked at his neighbor as if to ask what to say.

"Mr. Henry Wilkinson," she repeated. "Can you tell me where I will find him, gentlemen? I expected him to meet me here."

"A relation of yours, ma'm?" asked Great Scott.

"My husband, sir!"

"Great Scott! Thar, I have done et, now; tooken my own name in vain, but et was s'prised out of me. Howsumever, I kin be excused fer takin' my own name, sence I can't find none greater."

"Why, what are you talking about, sir?" the woman asked.

"About myself, jest now. But, to break the news to ye, ma'm. Et ain't no pleasant thing ter do—"

"Good heavens! what has happened, sir?"

"Well, ther truth ar', ma'm, that Henry Wilkinson is dead."

"My God!"

Wildly the woman uttered the words, and she wrung her hands in anguish. If not genuine, she was an actress superb.

And that question, as to whether the woman really was grief-stricken, was raised by Fairy Frank, who, with the detective, was looking down from the window upon the thronged street.

"Who can she be?" she asked Deadwood Dick.

"She lays claim to being your father's wife," was the quiet response.

"Well, she lies, flatly lies!" the girl declared almost fiercely. "She is not his wife."

"Has your father no wife living?"

"No; my mother is dead."

"Ha! that looks as if she means it, anyhow."

This, upon hearing her piercing cry, and seeing her grief.

"She is pretending," declared the girl, excitedly. "I will go down there and face her."

"You had better not," said Dick.

"Why?"

"Because, if what you say is true, she is determined to play her part well, evidently, and she might harm you."

"Ha! ha! I'd like to see her do that. If she can get the drop on me she has got to be quick about it. See?"

Like a flash of light the young woman had Deadwood Dick covered with a gun.

The detective had to smile.

"That was well done," he admitted.

"She would have to be quick indeed. But, you had better not go down just now, for another reason."

"What's that?"

"You might be tempted to use your gun, and so get yourself into trouble. You remain here, and let me go down and find out what I can. I will return and report to you presently."

"No, sir, never! Do you imagine that I will remain here and allow that woman to assert that she is my dead father's wife?"

"Well, you will do as you please, of course."

"Well, rather!" and the spirited girl threw open the door and darted out, making haste down the stairs and out to the street.

Deadwood Dick followed her quickly to see and hear what passed.

The woman who had just come by the stage was wringing her hands, and tears could be seen coursing down her cheeks.

Not a man in that crowd doubted her assertion that she was the wife of the dead banker; indeed, how could they doubt in the face of the evidence before them—her tears?

"Woman!"

So cried the young Gambler Queen, the moment she reached the street.

The new-comer looked quickly in her direction, and Fairy Frank faced her, her fists clinched and eyes flashing.

"Did you speak to me?"

"Yes, I spoke to you, pretender!"

"Pretender? I fail to understand you. Who are you?"

"Who am I, but Frank Wilkinson, the child of my dead father; while you, you are certainly not what you claim to be—his wife!"

The face of the other had paled at first, but now it flushed hotly, and advancing a step, her own fists clinched, she faced the younger woman in a fierce manner, crying:

"Wench! Henry Wilkinson never had a daughter, and you are an impostor if you lay claim to any such relationship."

"Have a care how you bestow your pet names, adventuress," retorted the young woman, whose hand had moved toward her pocket, but who had restrained the impulse to draw her revolver. "It is your own claim that is false, for my mother is dead, and my father had no other wife."

The crowd was silent with surprise.

That Fairy Frank was the daughter of Henry Wilkinson, no one had ever dreamed.

"Darn me ef this hyer ain't a case fer a Solomon to decide," blurted out one of the new-comers previously mentioned.

"An' you kin darn me, too," chimed in the other Peter, "ef you ain't jest about right, Pard Parrot. I reckon they'll have ter fight et out."

"You two had better keep your heads shut," Deadwood Dick suggested.

"Who the blazes be you?" demanded Bourbon.

"You'll find out, perhaps."

"That's what I'm askin' ye; I want ter know right now."

"Well, I am Deadwood Dick, Junior, if you must know, and I advise you to be quiet."

"Oh-ho!" gasped the bummer, in sur-

prise. "I have heard of you, Mister Deadwood Dick. I guess I'll take your advice and say nothin'."

For the moment the two women had stood silent, since the interruption made by Pete Parrot had been in a loud voice and they had both stopped to listen to his words.

Now the woman who had just come by the stage turned suddenly upon Deadwood Dick, holding out her hands imploringly.

"Are you truly Deadwood Dick?" she cried.

"That's the banner I am marching under, madam," the response.

"Will you not, then, sir, aid me in establishing my rights, and not allow me to be wronged?"

"Seems to me it is a matter that must rest entirely upon the proofs," Dick quietly answered.

"That's what's the matter," cried Fairy Frank. "Besides, woman, Deadwood Dick is already on my side in this affair, and is going to stay there."

"How about your own proofs?" asked Dick.

"I will furnish them."

"Then the proofs must decide the question. Perhaps there will be yet a third claimant in the field?"

"What do you mean?"

It was Fairy Frank who so demanded.

"Just what I say. But, ladies, do not quarrel here in public; the matter will certainly be adjusted all right."

"I will not be stilled until I am acknowledged as the wife of Henry Wilkinson, sir," cried the new-comer. "See! here is my certificate of marriage; and here, on this finger, I wear my wedding ring!"

She held a paper and her ring up to the view of all, and her face was still wet with tears.

CHAPTER VII.

DICK'S IDENTITY DISPUTED.

THE excitement was intense.

There stood the two women, facing each other, and every eye upon them.

Which was in the right in the matter? Was this woman indeed the widow of Henry Wilkinson? Or, was Fairy Frank his daughter?

This was not the stopping place of the stage—that is to say, it did not end its run here, but the driver waited, listening eagerly to what was being said.

For another moment all was silent.

It was the driver who this time broke the stillness, saying:

"Well, thar is a tangle fer ye to undo, citerzens of Silver Pocket, sure enough. Wish I could tarry an' see et out, but I can't. Hope ye'll do jesuice, that's all. But, when did Wilkinson die?"

"Die?" cried Mayor Talbot. "He was murdered, and that last night!"

"Murdered? My husband murdered!" cried the woman, claiming to be his wife, before the driver could speak again. "Who was the wretch that killed him?"

"Yes, ma'm, murdered," assured the mayor. "But, as to who killed him, that we don't know, yet, but we are goin' to know, if possible. That is what Deadwood Dick is doing here, trying to solve the mystery."

"And solve it, you must, Deadwood Dick!" the woman urged, earnestly. "My God! that I should come here to find my husband not only dead, but that he was murdered!"

"The truth shall be brought out, if possible, madam, I swear it," said Deadwood Dick earnestly.

"And jest hyer let me toot my bazoo oncet more before I go on my way," said the driver of the "hearse," calmly but earnestly.

"Toot away!" the mayor invited.

"You man," the driver addressed Deadwood Dick, "you lay claim to bein' Dead-

wood Dick, Junior, I understand you to say. Have I got that part all straight and right?"

"You have, sir," Dick coolly answered.

"You ar' Deadwood Dick, Junior, other-ways Dick Bristol?"

"I am, sir."

"Well, what I have ter say is, that you are not Deadwood Dick, Junior, nor Dick Bristol at all. Citerzens, I have seen Deadwood Dick, seen him at Deming, and this ain't the man—not by a long stop. Et hits me harder that he is Yuma Dodd, fer don't he answer the descrip of that cuss?"

All eyes were now upon Deadwood Dick—if he it was.

"Driver, I won't quarrel with you," Dick said, quietly, smiling the while, "but I am prepared to assert that you are greatly mistaken, this deal."

"Kin you prove that you ar' Deadwood Dick?"

"Maybe not, off hand, here where I am not known; but, can you prove that I am not he?"

"Don't reckon I kin, but I know et fer a fact all the same. Men of Silver Pocket, ef that man thar claims ter be Deadwood Dick, I brand him a liar, that is all I have ter—"

But, he corked up quickly, and made a dodge.

Deadwood Dick—so to acknowledge him until we have proof to the contrary, had whipped out a gun.

The mayor, however, caught his arm, and would not let him shoot, if that had been his intention; and in that moment the driver gathered up his ribbons and snapped his whip.

Instantly his six mules but themselves in motion, and the stage rolled off, the driver shouting back:

"Much 'bliged, Mayor Talbot, fer I reckon I'd 'a' got a dose that time, fer my plain talk, but I meant et! I'll try an' bring back proof next trip, fer what I've said—bring the Simon pure Dick, if I can!"

He cracked his whip again, and the lumbering vehicle went rattling and swaying down the gulch, its cloud of dust following it.

"I'm heartily glad you caught my arm, Mr. Talbot," said Deadwood Dick, then. "The fellow's language was strong, and I drew my gun on the spur of the moment, before I took time to reflect."

"But, durn et, stranger, that driver seems positive in what he says about ye, don't he?"

"He certainly speaks his convictions, sir. On your part, if you doubt me, I will drop matters quietly and leave town. Otherwise, I will remain until his next trip and abide by the proof he presents."

"That's fair enough," cried Great Scott.

"Remain by all means," urged Fairy Frank. "You are needed here, Deadwood Dick, to solve the mystery of my father's death, and to prove this woman the impostor she really is."

"Impostor yourself!" retorted the new-comer vengefully. "If you dare to address me again that way, I will tear out your eyes. Is not my grief enough to bear without having insults heaped on me besides? But, men of Silver Pocket, when was my husband killed? Where is he buried?"

"Husband, indeed!" sneered Fairy Frank, aside.

"Buried?" repeated Ted Talbot. "He ain't buried yet, ma'm. He was only killed last night—"

"Last night! Then his body—where is his body? Lead me to him, I beg of you, and keep this shameless creature away that she may not witness my grief. Let me ask you, has she any tears?"

"I had a reason for not seeing the body yet," cried Fairy Frank.

"Not seen it yet!" exclaimed the other. "Your father murdered last night, and you have not seen his body yet? It is enough; I

leave it to these men to say which story is true, yours or mine."

There was a nodding of heads in the crowd, and it could be seen that the newcomer was impressing conviction.

"How long have you known this young woman was Henry Wilkinson's daughter, gentlemen?" asked the weeping widow.

"The fact is, we never knowed it till this hour," declared the mayor.

"For the reason that it has been kept a secret," assured Fairy Frank, flushing.

"Why was it kept secret?"

"That was a business matter, woman."

"I have no objection to your calling me woman; that is what I am. More, I am a true woman, now the widow of him I loved, and who loved me."

"Let me ask a question just here," observed Fairy Frank. "Have you ever heard, men of Silver Pocket, my father mention that he had a wife living? Has he not, instead, declared his wife to be dead?"

"That's so!" exclaimed Great Scott. "Boys, hyer's a gal we know, and I for one am goin' to stand by her till t'other proves her claim."

"Thank you, sir," returned the gambler girl, with much feeling.

"And am I not offering proof?" cried the other claimant. "Witness, my marriage-certificate and my ring. Refuse me if ye can!"

"Let me see that certificate," spoke up Deadwood Dick.

"You will return it to my hands?"

"Assuredly."

The woman surrendered it for his inspection.

Dick read it aloud for the benefit of the crowd, as well as for his own information.

It certified that one Sarah Hunter had, on a certain day in a certain year, been made the lawful wife of Henry Wilkinson, and the instrument had been duly signed and witnessed.

"Surrender that paper to me!"

So cried Fairy Frank, and she had whipped out a revolver.

She held the drop on the detective, with the gun aimed straight at his head, and her voice had a ring of command.

Before any action could be taken on Dick's part, the other woman reached out like a flash and snatched the paper from his grasp, thrusting it into her bosom.

"Get it if you can!" she exclaimed.

The other looked as if tempted to shoot her and thus obtain it.

"Better go slow, Fairy!" cautioned the mayor. "You don't want no blood on your head, I reckon."

"You are right, Mr. Talbot," putting away the weapon. "It is trying, however, to leave this woman in possession of my mother's certificate, for she must have stolen it."

"Where and how could I steal it?"

"That is for you to say. I know my mother had a paper like it."

"Certainly not my certificate, anyhow, nor any that proved her the wife of Henry Wilkinson."

"What! would you insinuate that I am a child out of wedlock? Have a care, or you will tempt me beyond what I can bear. Henry Wilkinson was a man of honor, and my mother was a lady!"

"I agree with you in the first statement, heartily."

CHAPTER VIII.

COMING TO A COMPROMISE.

THINGS at Silver Pocket were certainly in a state of complication.

First, there was the mystery of the death of Henry Wilkinson, and right upon that the rival claimants.

Then, too, there had been the declaration of the stage-driver that Deadwood Dick was

not Deadwood Dick at all, but some other person. This, however, had been already overlooked.

As the woman spoke, now, she turned her back upon the Gambler Queen.

"Will some one conduct me to the place where my dead husband is?" she asked, earnestly.

"Yes, I will," spoke up the mayor. "Ef you ar' his wife, et is your right, and if not, that ain't no fault of ours. Come right this way, please."

"Must my father's body be polluted by her touch?" cried Fairy Frank, wringing her hands. "Mayor Talbot, how can you allow a stranger to blind you thus? Have you not known me longest?"

"That don't count, miss," was the answer. "To-day is the first time you have ever laid claim to bein' Henry Wilkinson's gal."

"And it was for a business reason only, as I told you."

"Can't help et; this woman must be right till she is proven to be in the wrong."

And so saying, the mayor and the woman went on their way toward the rear of the Silver Pocket Exchange.

"Deadwood Dick, will not you help me in this unequal fight?" the girl pleaded.

"As far as possible, I will."

"You do not disbelieve my story, do you?"

"Is there any reason why I should? At the same time, this other has the stronger claim, just now."

"How do you make that out?"

"Why, taking all the circumstances together. She came here expecting to find Wilkinson alive. At the news of his death, witness her grief. Then, at the further information that he had been murdered, she was all but overcome. These are very strong points in her favor."

"That's so, b'gosh!" observed a listener.

"What's all that 'side of ther fact that Fairy Frank has been right under the care of Wilkinson fer a year an' more, right in this hyer town?" demanded Great Scott. "It was no secret that he was backin' her bank, an' when she wanted help he was the man she went to. If he wanted the secret kept, for business reasons, that was his biz. See?"

"There is certainly good argument for each side," admitted the detective.

"And the right ought to stand and the false be shown up," declared the girl, hotly.

"I am going to my father's room."

"Better let me have your revolver before you go," suggested Dick.

"I can take care of it, thank you. I will not draw it again, I promise you. But, come with me."

Thither they went, many of the crowd following them.

"Wull, I'm darn'd!" exclaimed Pete Parrot, speaking for the first time in some minutes. "Pete Bourbon, what do you think of all this hyer mix o' mess anyhow?"

"That's more'n I kin tell right off quick," responded his ragged pard. "Et looks as if thar was a mystery hyer as big as a hoss. Let's put up our mules, take a drink, an' see more of et."

Meanwhile Deadwood Dick had gone on with the Gambler Queen, and they had entered the room where the crime had been done.

The body had been laid out straight on the bed and a sheet spread over it, while the room had been set in order.

Not that it had been badly out of order, but things had now been set straight.

The woman who had come by the stage had thrown herself upon the body of her claimed husband, and was weeping bitterly.

Deadwood Dick laid hold of the arm of his companion and enjoined silence, and they stood with the others in the room, witnesses to the grief of this stranger.

Suddenly she ceased weeping, sprung up, and, raising her right hand, made a vow

that she would hunt down the slayer of her husband, if life was spared her.

"May I ask you a question, madam?" now spoke Deadwood Dick.

"What is it?"

"Do you think it is unlikely that this man killed himself?"

"Entirely out of the question, sir. There was no reason why he should have done so; and he was not that kind of a man."

"Was he looking for you?"

"He was. We were both looking forward to this meeting, after being apart for some years."

"Oh! you lying hypocrite!" cried Fairy Frank, in rage.

"What! you followed me here?"

"I came here, where you have no right."

"Where you have none—"

Each took a step forward; but hands held them apart.

"This must not be," commanded Deadwood Dick. "You must not come to blows over this dead body. After the funeral, proper steps can be taken by both of you to establish your claims."

"Pardon me," said the younger woman. "I could not hold my tongue."

"Be better for you if you do; so take warning!" retorted the other, in the sternest manner.

"Will ye 'low me to suggest something?" asked the mayor.

"Yes, sir."

"And then we'll see about heeding your suggestion," added Fairy Frank.

"Well, I suggest that both of you leave this matter now to me and the detective, and let us attend to all the arrangements, and take charge of the effects."

"I will abide by that, if the other will, provided it does not debar me from seeing my dead husband, and of accompanying his body to the grave," answered the assumed widow.

"And it pleases me better than having this stranger in full charge over my father's remains," declared the other.

"Then that settles it. Go to the hotel, both of you, but see that you keep out of each other's way. As mayor of this camp, I must take this matter in hand myself, to a certain extent."

"If you are the mayor, sir, I trust you."

"And I trust you, Deadwood Dick," spoke the other.

The two left the room, but not together, and as they passed out, Pete Parrot and his pard came in.

"What do you want here?" demanded the mayor.

"That is what I should like to know," echoed Great Scott.

"Wal, et ain't no secret that I know of," rejoined Pete Parrot. "We have come with the crowd to take a look at ther mystery."

"That's all," chimed in the other Pete. "Wanted ter see what kind of a murder ye kin git up hyer in your one-hoss camp. And I ber darn ef et ain't about as good as ye find anywhar!"

"You are a pair of brutes!" averred Deadwood Dick, angrily.

"You bet!" piped Polly, just at that moment, and in spite of the time and the occasion the crowd laughed.

"Don't you be so flip with yer flapper, Miss Polly, or you will git your neck wrung," avowed Pete, severely. "This ain't no time fer none of your nonsense. Git down thar, dast ye!" and he gave the bird a poke that sent it down deep into his pocket.

"Ef I owned that 'ar bird, et wouldn't live two minutes," declared the other Peter.

"And as ye don't own et, et will," retorted Pete Parrot.

"Come, get out of here, both of ye," ordered the mayor. "Clear the room, everybody. Deadwood Dick and me ar' goin' to have a quiet talk about this matter."

"All right, ef ye mean et, Mister Man,"

assented Bourbon. "Don't keer to argy the p'int with ye, not a tall. Come on, Peter, pard!"

They left the room, arm in arm, and the others having been ordered out too, all followed these queer customers to see what would be next on their programme.

CHAPTER IX.

ONE SECRET UNSEEN.

"Now," demanded the mayor, when the room had been emptied and he had closed the door, "what do you think of this matter, Deadwood Dick?"

"It is a puzzle—more of a puzzle than ever," Dick admitted.

"By the way, before we go any further, was there any foundation in what the stage-driver said?"

"Well, mayor, it is just like this: As I am a stranger here I cannot prove to you that I am Deadwood Dick, for there is no one here with whom I am acquainted; but, let the driver prove to the contrary, if he can."

"Well, I'm satisfied it must be all right."

"That's all that need be said, then."

"Now, that settled, how are we going to get at the truth of the matter? Do you think this new-comer is really the wife of Henry Wilkinson?"

"Her claim seems to be good."

"Better than that of the girl that she is his daughter, I should say. You see, here she comes, expectin' to find Wilkinson alive. When she finds he's dead, she is all broke up, and there was no denying her tears."

"True enough."

"I haven't seen the gal shed any, have you?"

"No, but she seems thoroughly in earnest in denouncing the woman as a fraud."

"Yes, but there is money back of it all, Deadwood Dick. Wilkinson has a big fortune, in cold cash, right here."

"Just as reasonable to suppose the woman is after it, if you bring that up as the incentive. But, the greater question is, who killed the man? That is the first thing to be cleared up."

"You don't suspect Pat Griffin, then?"

"I do not; at any rate, not yet."

"But, the button?"

"It is only enough to bring his name into question."

"That's so; it isn't any proof direct, but it is a clue. I won't forget it. But, how to settle the question between the women?"

"You think the new-comer has the best claim."

"I do."

"Well, the other's is not bad."

"What do you mean?"

"Are you aware that Wilkinson had this room arranged so that she could secretly visit him?"

The mayor gave a start.

"No," he cried. "Is that so?"

"Yes; and, now that the man is dead, that secret may as well be made known—in fact, must be."

"I gree with ye, Deadwood Dick. But, do you know the secret yourself? I take it the gal has told ye about it, eh?"

"Yes; and the fact that she knows this secret, is strong proof in favor of her claim, don't you think so?"

"It proves something. Does anybody else know about this secret way of getting into this room?"

"Not that I'm aware of."

"Bad for the gal, then."

"How so?"

"S'pose it is hinted that she killed Henry Wilkinson?"

Deadwood Dick looked hard at the mayor for a moment before he offered any rejoinder.

"Do you think it's possible?" he asked.

"I don't want to think it's possible, Deadwood Dick."

"Speak out plainly, sir; don't be afraid to express your views."

"Well, look at the matter jest as it is, then. She knowed of this secret."

"Exactly."

"And she hadn't shown herself to-day till this new comer arrived by the stage and claimed to be Wilkinson's wife."

"True enough."

"Don't it look as though she was afraid she would not get the prize, and so was red-hot to assert her claim? We both know she hasn't wept any."

"I can't deny it."

"Then what have ye got to say?"

"Well, it is the nature of some persons not to be able to weep when sudden grief comes upon them—"

"Not often the case with women, I reckon. They are gen'ly ready to blubber over at any time, no matter what happens."

"I am speaking about the exceptional cases. Then, too, had she done the deed it is not likely that she would have made known the means by which she gained entrance, is it?"

"Durn it, I hadn't thought of that."

"There is something else that perhaps you haven't thought of."

"What is that?"

"Seems to me it wasn't just the natural thing for this new woman to come here armed with her marriage-certificate as she did. Who was going to question whether she was Wilkinson's wife or not?"

"I don't see nothin' in that."

"Well, I do. If she had been a newly-made bride, then it would have been perfectly natural for her to have her papers on hand, but this woman is no chicken, and claims to have been married years ago. You see, I am looking at the thing in a cold, business way."

"Too devilish cold, I should say."

"No more so than your way of viewing the girl's side of the matter."

"You seem inclined to stand up for her."

"Not a bit, as you will find before we get done. I am here only to get at the truth of the matter."

"And that is just what we want, nothing more nor less. But, you seem to be against the new-comer, as if you was tryin' to boost her out of any claim, when she appears to hold the best hand."

"As I have admitted."

"But, about this secret way of getting into the room?"

"I doubt whether we can find it, without the help of the young woman. She said there was a door at the head of the bed."

"The deuce!"

They moved forward together to the head of the bed, where there was a space of a yard or so between it and the wall.

There the detective passed his hand over the wall carefully, as if to find a door where there appeared to be none, and the mayor was watching his movements with interest.

"D'ye find it?" he asked.

"No, as you see," Dick answered.

The wall was not of plaster, but of wood, and there were numerous cracks this way and that.

It looked as if the partition had been made up of odds and ends of stuff left over after the rest of the building had been made. The mayor said it had been put in after the building was finished.

"Foller the cracks," the mayor suggested.

"What I'm trying to do, and I think I can detect one side of the door."

"But, how to open et, eh? That will be the sticker, unless ye send for the gal to come show us."

"Send for her."

"I'll go myself, ter oncet."

The mayor left the room immediately by the rear door, and the detective turned the key in the lock the moment he had gone.

That done, a heavy sigh escaped him,

and he turned to the form on the bed, and bending over it, imprinted a kiss on the cold forehead!

When he straightened up there was a moisture in his eyes, and he stood with bowed head, his hands clasped loosely in front of his body.

A tear welled forth, and running down his cheek, fell upon the bed, followed by another and yet another! Suddenly, however, he checked them, and wiped all traces from his face.

"Too bad! too bad!" he spoke to himself. "But, the mystery shall be cleared, the dead avenged; I swear it!"

By the time the mayor returned with the young woman, the man was himself again, and no one could have guessed what he had been doing while there alone with the dead.

What was his secret? What meant his actions?

CHAPTER X.

WHAT FAIRY FRANK KNEW.

"MR. TALBOT informs me you want me here," the young woman spoke, upon entering the room.

"Yes, I sent for you," said Dick. "We want to know all about the secret way into and out of this room, if you please."

"Certainly, sir."

She stepped forward, but suddenly stopped, gazing at the dead.

Her bosom was seen to heave, and throwing herself suddenly upon her knees beside the bed, she caught one of the dead man's hands and pressed it to her lips.

"Poor papa, poor papa!" she moaned. "Oh! that I could weep like others, and so express what I feel. Mr. Talbot, and you, Deadwood Dick, you will not allow me to be robbed of my parent, will you?"

"You shall have every chance to prove your claim," said Dick, earnestly.

She rose from her knees, going immediately to the head of the bed, where she laid her hand upon a certain place in the woodwork. A door opened to her touch.

It was not a door of ordinary shape, on this side, but was a zigzag portion of the woodwork.

The opening, however, was straight cut, and the other side of the door represented a painted panel of the wall in the other room.

"This is it," she spoke.

"And now the other," said Dick.

"We will need a light, for you see the room is dark. The tight shutters have not been opened to-day."

"We had better open a shutter," Dick suggested.

The mayor went in and opened one of the windows, then a shutter, and a flood of light came into the room.

As has been said, the Express Office was in the same room, the bank being on one side and the Express business office on the other, but the room had not been opened before since the discovery of the crime.

Pat Griffin had made some ado about being thus shut out of his place of business, but the mayor had remained firm in his decision respecting the opening of the building. If he got the detective he had sent for, he wanted him to be there when the room was first opened.

Now he had his wish.

The moment the window was opened, the detective stooped and picked up something from the floor.

It was a woman's handkerchief.

"Whose is this?" he asked, holding it up to view.

"I guess it is mine," said Fairy Frank.

"I must have just dropped it."

"Look and see."

She took it from his hand, and immediately said:

"Yes, it is mine, sir."

"And you just dropped it?"

"Yes."

The girl spoke naturally.

"You are mistaken," said the detective. "I saw it when the door was first opened, before you had entered."

Now, for a second, her face paled, and she looked confused. It was for a second only, however, and then she thrust her fingers up under her over-waist.

"You are right," she declared, drawing out another handkerchief. "Here is mine. You see, I always carry it here, and I thought I had dropped it."

"But, you said this was yours, on looking at it."

"I thought it was."

"And it must be, for it is just like the one you have now produced."

"Yes, yes, it is mine. I was not mistaken. But, how it came here, I cannot tell. And, see! there is blood on it!"

"I see there is; I noticed that at once. Just bear in mind this incident, mayor, if you please. Everything is important, in a matter of this sort. Now, let's look around."

The young woman was pale, now, and seemed nervous.

They were on the banking-side of the room, behind an inclosing railing, and near at hand was a safe.

"Have you any knowledge how to open this?" Dick asked of the Gambler Queen.

"No, sir," her answer.

"Your father did not trust you with the combination?"

"He did not. There was no reason why he should, though he would have done so had there been such reason."

"Yes, I suppose so. Then the combination is lost with his death?"

"I suppose it must be."

"Do you know what is in the safe?"

"A large sum of money, and some private books and papers, besides the books and papers belonging to the business."

"Then you have seen it open?"

"Oh, yes, many times, when I have been here alone with papa."

The detective turned away from the safe, and passed out from the inclosure on that side of the room.

The other side was similarly closed, in and that side was next to the staircase that led up from the street to the room known as the Monte Carlo.

On this side was another safe, but a smaller one than that used by the bank. And the moment the eyes of the three fell upon it they all discovered a piece of white paper that was sticking out under the door.

"Mr. Griffin is careless about closing up his papers," the detective remarked.

"Just what I was going to say, myself," added the young woman. "But, for the secret door, here it is, sir."

She there touched another spring, and a door opened at her touch, disclosing a darkened space immediately under the stairs.

"And here," she added, stepping within and laying hold upon a lever, "is the means by which the stair is lifted at the bottom so that a person may pass out."

"Lift it," said Dick.

She did so, with little effort.

The bottom part of the stairs was lifted, being hinged, to a height of about four feet, and a person could easily go out, by stooping.

"And how do you close it, from the outside?" Dick asked.

"By simply pushing down, sir."

"And you can lift and open it from that side?"

"As easily as here."

"Who, besides yourself, knows about this staircase secret?"

"No one, to my knowledge."

"You must be aware that you are giving evidence that must tell against you, should suspicion of the crime fall upon you."

"On me!" the girl exclaimed. "Can it be possible that any one would think I killed my papa? I had no thought or fear in telling what I knew, being innocent; why should I have?"

"The innocent fear nothing," agreed the detective.

"But all the same, they get into trouble sometimes," added the mayor.

"That is true."

"Who has the key to this front door that leads to the gaming-room up-stairs?" Deadwood Dick inquired.

"I have one, and papa had one," answered the girl.

"You have yours with you?"

"I have."

She produced it.

Dick took it and tried the door with it, finding that it was the key it was said to be, whether this was important or not.

"Well, one thing is positive," he observed. "You, Miss Wilkinson, to give you the name you claim, certainly had means and knowledge to gain entrance into the dead man's room."

"As I have willingly shown you."

"True."

Dick now stepped back again into the Express room, the mayor with him, while the girl closed down the steps and shut the secret door.

The detective stepped to the safe and looked at the paper that protruded under the door.

On that paper was the signature of Henry Wilkinson.

"This is strange," Dick called attention. "Here is the name of the dead man on this bit of paper visible from the safe."

"What's et doin' there?" cried the mayor.

"This is the Express agent's safe, and why should Henry Wilkinson use it, when he had a safe of his own? I'll fetch Pat an' have it opened."

He left the room immediately, to bring Griffin.

As soon as he was gone, the detective turned to Fairy Frank, and laying a hand on her shoulder, said:

"See here, young woman, I know you are not the child of Henry Wilkinson, and I want to warn you that there is the greatest danger of your being arrested on suspicion."

CHAPTER XI.

THE TANGLE WORSE TANGLED.

THE young woman recoiled, turned pale, and for a moment seemed to shrink within herself, but, the next instant, she straightened to her full height, her fists clinched, and looked the detective squarely in the eyes.

"Then, it seems, you are against me," she cried.

"I state that which I know," was the quiet answer. "Henry Wilkinson was not your father."

"He was!"

"It is useless for you to try to deceive me, young lady. I know what I am talking about."

"You may think you do, but you certainly do not."

"Pretend as much as you will, the fact remains. Now, can you clear yourself of this suspicion, if it does come to your arrest?"

"You will not allow me to be arrested."

"I can not hinder it."

"You can."

"How?"

"That is for you to say. Help me to win this case, and half the fortune to be scooped in shall be yours."

This acknowledgment was as good as a confession.

"Could you expect me to make any terms with a murderess? You are—"

"Listen to me, Deadwood Dick," and she

clutched his arm: "I swear by all I hold sacred that I did not kill that man!"

"But, you know who did."

"I swear I do not!"

"Have you any suspicion?"

"Not the slightest, sir; I swear it!"

The detective now looked puzzled, and released the young woman.

"I have studied you well enough to believe that you are speaking the truth," he said, thoughtfully.

"How could you know I made a false claim?"

"No matter; I was sure on that point. But, what was your relationship with the dead man?"

"One that needs not to be mentioned," with a flush of shame.

"I see. And the knowledge of his wealth led you to pretend that he was your father?"

"Yes, yes; I see I can hide nothing from such a man as you."

"And this being known, any man would be willing to swear that you had killed him to further your scheme."

"Wrong, wrong! I have told only the truth on that point."

"Well, here come the mayor and the agent. Play on your role, and so force the other claimant to show her hand, for she is as false as you."

"Ha! you think so?"

"I know it."

"Really, I took her to be all she claimed. Trust me to give her a hard fight, if you will keep my secret."

"I intend to keep it, for the present. I only wanted to let you know, privately, that you were not blinding me; that was all, Fairy Frank."

The coming of the mayor and the Express agent hindered their saying anything further on that line.

"What's this the mayor tells me?" demanded Pat Griffin.

"I don't know what he has told you," said Dick.

"About a paper that sticks out of my safe—is that it?"

"It is."

Pat got down and looked at it.

"I don't know how it came there," he declared. "It certainly wasn't there when I closed up the office last night and locked the safe."

"Has any one else a key to the safe?"

"Not a soul."

"It is not a combination lock?"

"No."

"Had you your key with you last night?"

"Certainly I had. It never leaves me, when I am not in the office, and I never leave the office without it."

"Did you and Wilkinson ever do business with, or for, each other?"

"Never, save when he had something to send by Express, or received something that way."

"Well, open your safe now."

The agent did so.

No sooner had he opened the door than an exclamation escaped him.

"By dad!" he cried. "These things were not here last night when I shut up shop; that I'll swear!"

On top of everything else was a bundle of papers and bank-notes, looking as if it had been thrust in with haste.

And on the top of the bundle, which the detective saw immediately, was the bloody imprint of a thumb!

Had the slayer of Henry Wilkinson put these papers here?

"Can you offer any suggestion as to how they can have come here?" asked Deadwood Dick.

"I can not, sir. I am completely knocked out, now."

"You notice that blood-mark?"

"I do."

"You know what it suggests?"

"Only too well, sir."
"Are you the man who killed Henry Wilkinson?"

"Great God! no!"
The agent paled, he staggered, and had to grasp the railing for support.

"I have not forgotten the button you found, Mr. Deadwood Dick," reminded the mayor.

"Certainly not, sir," said Dick.
"But, how do ye suppose I could get into the room and out again, leavin' it fastened as it was?" the agent demanded.

It must be remarked here that the secret door had been closed and the other door opened before the mayor went to bring the agent into the room; therefore, unless he had previous knowledge, he could know nothing about it.

"You must have had some secret way."
"I had no way at all, when Wilkinson locked up the building."

"Some one had, that is a sure thing, sir. Else, how was Mr. Wilkinson murdered?"

"I don't know, I cannot even guess. But, is it quite sure that he was murdered?"

"No question about that, now. Witness the bloody mark on these papers."

"Yes, that is true."

"And let me call your attention to another mark of the same kind over there on the wall. Do you see it?"

True enough, there was the imprint of a bloody finger, and it was on the wall at the very edge of the secret door.

"That is a strange place for the mark to be," observed the agent. "What was the murderer doing away over there? Now if it had been near the door, or on the door—"

"Maybe he was groping his way in the dark," interrupted Dick.

"And if that was the case, it is proof that he was a stranger in the room," the agent argued.

Pat was now told to remove from the safe everything that was not his, but the bundle already mentioned was all that had not been in his keeping. Then attention was turned to the bank safe.

This had to be forced open, a couple of men being called from the mines to do the work, and when the door had been opened it was discovered that the safe had been completely looted of everything of value it had contained. But, here an additional discovery was made.

Was Pat Griffin the guilty man, after all?

CHAPTER XII.

TOM HOYT, THE SPORT.

"WHAT is this?" Deadwood Dick asked, picking an article up from the bottom of the safe, where it looked as if it had been pinched by the closing of the door. "I suppose it belonged to Mr. Wilkinson."

"What is it?" asked the mayor.

"A watch-charm, I take it to be."

Pat Griffin was seen to start and turn pale to the lips.

"Is it yours, sir?" asked the detective, sternly.

"Et is, true as you live, Pat!" cried the mayor. "It is the charm you have worn every day since ye came here."

"There is no mistaking it," declared Fairy Frank.

"I can't deny it," acknowledged the agent.

"Do you know how it came here?" Dick queried.

"I do not."

"When did you first miss it?"

"This morning, sir. I have been looking for it, but not very much, for I supposed I must have lost it in the office. Thought more than likely I had caught it fast while handling some goods."

"This thing is growin' serious," remarked the mayor.

"It certainly is," agreed Fairy Frank.
"Deadwood Dick, what ought to be done?" asked the mayor.

"That is for you to say, as mayor of the town, sir."

"Well, I'll act, since I see you don't want to. Pat Griffin, you ar' my prisoner."

"Then you accuse me of the crime, Ted Talbot?"

"How can I help it? Thar was that button on the floor, then the money in your safe, and now this thing found in the bank safe. It looks as if you had got the charm fast when ye shut the door."

Pat was pale, and leaned against the railing.

"Let me call your attention to other points, though," said Deadwood Dick, in rejoinder. "That button was cut from this man's coat, as I can prove. Then, would he have been likely to put any of the stolen stuff in his own safe? And, had he caught his chain, could he not have opened the door again and released it, if he had opened it once?"

Dick looked sharply at the mayor while he put these questions.

The mayor looked pale, and it was evident he had not thought of this. As for Fairy Frank, she looked at the detective keenly.

"Darn me ef that ain't straight," the mayor admitted. "But, Pat Griffin is a wise cuss, and mebbey this was just his game, to throw suspicion upon himself and then squirm out of it."

"I'd be too wise to try that on, mayor," the accused man asserted.

"But, there is reason to arrest ye, all the same, and you are my prisoner. I warn you not to try to resist, Patrick!"

"I'll not do that. But, ye will allow me to turn the office over to some one so that the business may go on the same? It won't be regular, but I know a friend I can trust."

"Who is that?"

"Tom Hoyt."

"And who is Tom Hoyt?" asked Dick.

"He is a sport about town," explained Fairy Frank.

"I have not met him, then?"

"Nor have I seen him this morning. He and Pat Griffin have been sort of pards, since they played together against me one night."

"Well, mayor, I would grant what the prisoner asks," said Dick, since his job may depend on his keeping the office open for business. At the same time put two men on duty here to guard the bank."

"It shall be done."

So, Pat Griffin was arrested, and when he was led from the building a prisoner, the crowd in the street set up a howl.

The denizens of the camp being idle, many of them had been improving the time by taking on "jags of jig-water," as they termed it, and many of these fellows immediately called for a lynching.

There was another element, however, and in the majority, that opposed it.

"What!" cried Timothy McFarrel.

"Would ye have me believe that Pat Griffin did the deed? Mayor, ye are as much mistaken as though ye had dreamed ye had burned yer grandfather's will."

"There's strong proof, though, Tim."

"Strong proof, is it?"

The points were named, and as soon as the crowd got hold of them there was a still louder cry for the lynching.

"How are ye goin' to git out of et, Pat?" asked one man.

"I trust to my friends to get me out," was the answer. "I swear to ye, boys, that I am innocent."

He was lodged in the lock-up before harm could happen him, and a strong guard was placed over the calaboose, both for his safety and safe keeping, and the general impression was that Deadwood Dick had ordered his arrest.

Dick and the mayor returned to the hotel in company.

"I am afraid it will be all up with Pat," the mayor remarked.

"Why so?" asked Dick.

"Because, I don't see how we can prove that he did not do it. In fact, it fastens itself upon me that he did."

"I don't agree with you," dissented Dick. "You know the points I mentioned in his favor. It looks to me more as if some one had tried to put up a job on him, taking everything together."

The mayor looked hard at the detective—a look that Dick returned, and it seemed that each was set in his own conviction in the matter.

"What are you going to do now, then?" the mayor asked.

"I am going to try to find the stolen money and papers, and try to put the crime where it belongs."

"Have you any suspicions?"

"Yes."

"What are they?"

"Well, they are hardly ripe enough to be mentioned yet, but I feel sure that Pat Griffin will go clear."

"Then how about Fairy Frank?"

"Innocent."

"Well, it's mighty queer, is all I can say, that you take sides with the very ones against whom everything points."

"I go by what I see, Mr. Talbot. Now that blood-mark on the wall, that was not made by a woman's hand, as you know well enough."

"I guess you are right, come to think of it."

"There is another duty you must not neglect."

"What is that?"

"There are men here whom you can trust to play the detective in a small way, no doubt."

"Oh, yes, there's some here that would like to be detectives, but a case like this would be a load more'n they could carry."

"Then give them a lighter one. A watch must be kept, and if any person has a notion to take a sudden departure, or tries to sneak away from the camp, he or she must be held."

"Hal I see. That ain't slow, true as you live. But, here comes Tom Hoyt, the feller Pat spoke about."

A rather sportish individual was coming toward them.

"Tom, you are wanted," the mayor greeted him.

"What in wonder has been going on here?"

"Where have you been?"

"Was over to Creek Camp last night, and have just got back. They tell me Henry Wilkinson has been murdered."

"They have told ye straight, and Pat Griffin has been locked up charged with the crime. But, let me introduce you to Deadwood Dick, the great detective."

"Pat Griffin!" the sport repeated, as he at the same time extended his hand to Dick.

"Why, he was the last man in the world who would do a deed like that! He is my friend, and I know him."

"But, the detective here holds that he is innocent, spite of all," the mayor then informed. "He don't believe him guilty at all."

"I'm mighty glad of that, Deadwood Dick," the sport cried. "You fasten the crime where it does belong, and we'll see that you get your reward for doing it. Pat Griffin guilty of murder? Never!"

CHAPTER XIII.

ALL AROUND AT SEA.

Tom Hoyt took charge of the Express Office, as Pat Griffin had requested.

Men were at the same time put in charge

of the bank, not to do business, but to watch over the property.

Others were secretly detailed by the mayor to play the detective, as Deadwood Dick had suggested, and these were on the alert for any one who showed an undue inclination to get away.

The body of the murdered man was made ready for burial, and the funeral was to be held on the following morning.

Fairy Frank had put on mourning, or at any rate was making it ready.

In the mean time Deadwood Dick had an interview with the woman who had come by the stage.

She had taken a room at the Spread Eagle, and from her room was directing, as far as she was permitted by the mayor, the funeral arrangements.

Fairy Frank, too, was given directions, and by a little careful planning the mayor managed to pacify them both without letting either know that the other was having anything her way.

Dick sent up to the woman's room and sought an interview.

"You still insist that you are the widow of Henry Wilkinson, I suppose?" was Dick's greeting.

"Why, certainly, sir; and why should I not?"

"The reason why you should not, is because it is false. You are not the widow of Henry Wilkinson, because his wife died a good many years ago, and he never married again."

The detective was looking her steadily in the eyes, but she met his gaze unfalteringly.

"Have you come here to insult me in my time of grief, sir?"

"I have come to let you know you can not deceive me."

"You would wrong me of my rights in favor of that pert miss who claims to be Henry Wilkinson's daughter. You shall not do it."

"I mean to favor no one, madam. I am only determined that the truth shall be brought to light, no matter whom it may crush."

"You are determined to crush me."

"Not if you can prove the claim you make; but, that will be impossible."

"I have proved it already, sir. Did I not come here expecting to find my husband alive and well? Have I not my marriage-certificate? What more can you ask in the way of proof?"

"You will have to prove that you are she who was Sarah Hunter, madam."

"That can be done, but not in a day. You ask unreasonable things, sir. On the other hand, can you prove that I am not Sarah Hunter? or that such was not my maiden name?"

"That remains to be seen."

"I defy you to prove it, sir!" and the woman assumed an air of defiance in keeping with her words. "And, since I know you to be against me in this matter, go! Leave my presence, and do not speak to me again. Not a word, sir, but go!"

She pointed at the door, and the detective, bowing as if taking leave of a queen, backed out of her presence.

As soon as the door had closed, a look of fire came into the woman's eyes.

She stood with clinched fists, staring at the door, and her face was hard and determined in its expression.

"Curse him!" she muttered. "He would talk me. But, he cannot do it; no, he shall not do it! I am glad that he has shown his hand so plainly. Deadwood Dick, look well to yourself!"

Meantime, Dick had passed down the stairs and entered the bar-room of the establishment.

A smile that might mean much had appeared on his face as he closed the door on

leaving the woman's room, but his face, was in repose when he appeared below.

He looked around for the mayor.

The mayor was there, in conversation with Great Scott.

Going forward, Dick made one of the party, and the mayor immediately asked:

"Well, what think you of her?"

"The same as I thought at first, that she is a fraud, sir," was the detective's prompt assurance.

"I don't see how it can be possible, sir," the mayor dissented. "It looked like a clear case, to me. You wouldn't give her credit of being such an actress as that."

"I have to, sir."

"You can't begin to measure the deception in a female critter, Talbot," exclaimed Great Scott.

"Yes, but this would be impossible, that any woman could call up her tears at will, like this one did. What are you talking about? No one could do that."

"I don't agree with you," said the detective.

"No, ner me," cried Great Scott. "They ar' a bad lot, the best of 'em, an' that's the reason I never hitched up with one of their kind."

"Pardner, I 'gree wi' you, most heartily," here struck in another voice, and a man wheeled around from a table near by, where he was playing at cards with another, and he was recognized as Pete Bourbon.

The man he was playing with was Pete Parrot.

The bird Polly was on the other Pete's shoulder, apparently asleep.

"What do you know about it?" growled Great Scott.

"I've seen too much of the crooked cussedness and cussed crookedness of wimmin not to know somethin' about et, pardner," was the reply. "You can't bet on one of 'em fer two hours straight in a lifetime."

"Well, that's all right, but you jest tend to yer game, an' leave us to 'tend to our own biz."

"You needn't git r'iled about et, pardner. When I heard a man 'spress my own sentiments so kerkrectly I couldn't help chippin' in, that was all. See?"

"That's all right, then. Turn to your me."

"No harm done, I hope?"

"Not a bit."

"All right, then. Now, Pete Parrot, darn your dishonest old skin, whose play was et?"

"Let's take a drink!"

"I'm with ye!" piped the parrot, and with a flap of her wings she left Pete Parrot and flew to the bar.

The patrons of the bar-room had already been having considerable of fun with the bird.

It was something new, for the camp of Silver Pocket, to hear a bird talk as this one talked, and to see it imbibe the fiery liquor.

"Have you the wherewith to pay?" asked the man at the bar, hesitating.

"Ef I haven't my pard has," answered Bourbon. "so set 'em out and be in a hurry about et."

"Yas, hyer's ther stuff!" reassured Pete Parrot, as the man at the bar looked at him. "You kin set 'em up this once, but you ain't to trust Bourbon Pete to a drop unless I say so."

And while the lower element in the room indulged their appetite thus, the trio at the table continued their conversation.

"How, then, ar' we goin' to come at the right of the matter?" asked Mayor Talbot.

"This woman claims to be his wife, and Fairy Frank claims to be his daughter, and who kin decide?"

"They must have a public hearing," suggested Dick.

"That's about it," agreed Great Scott.

"Then we'll have et to-morrow after the funeral is done with," declared the mayor.

Night was drawing down, when finally they parted company, and the camp having had an idle day, the street was full of brawling men, many of whom were looking for fight, as the expression goes.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE RISE AND FALL OF SCOTT.

AMONG others who were in this hilarious condition just mentioned, was the original Great Scott.

Great as he was, Mr. Scott had a weakness in this direction which asserted itself once in a while, and this was one of the occasions. He had been drinking quite heavily while seated so long with the mayor and Deadwood Dick.

He probably did not know himself that he was off his equilibrium until he rose from the table, when he made a headlong veer across the room, and never stopped till he came up all standing against Pete Parrot and his pard, Bourbon, almost knocking the latter off his pins.

"Hold your hosses!" cried Polly, instantly.

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Bourbon Pete. "What ar' ye tryin' ter do?"

"What's ther matter with yer locomotion?" added Pete Parrot. "B-tter try et again."

"I'll show ye what I'm tryin' ter do!" roared Great Scott, turning upon Bourbon like a maddened bull. "What did ye git in my way fer?"

"I didn't git in yer way," retorted the bummer.

"Then what did yer yell Great Scott at me fer? That's my name, and I've got a patent right to et, as bein' ther only original Great Scott in ther known world. I reckon I'll dangle your rags fer you. Yeou-ow!"

With a snarl like a hyena, something that was intended to be terrifying, he made a reach for Peter's collar.

His hand was knocked aside.

"Git out, ye snarlin' tarrier," cried the ragged Peter, with a tone of disgust. "Ef ye don't, I'll wipe up ther floor with yer."

"What! You'll wipe up ther floor wi' me? Yeou-ow-ow!"

He made another attempt to get hold of his man.

"Sock et to 'em!" cried Polly. "Sock et to 'em!"

The crowd had to laugh, yet many looked upon the scene with serious apprehension, for Great Scott was known to be a terror when he was at about this stage of a drunk.

Again did the man miss his calculation, however, in spite of his greatness, and this time he got a crack on the arm that made him howl with pain, and which turned him half around and almost deposited his ponderosity upon the floor.

"I warn yer not ter try et again, now," growled Pete Bourbon. "Ef ye do, I'll set these hyer old rags o' mine in motion an' jest more'n fill yer eyes full o' dust, you kin pend on et. Keep off, now, or by toddy, ef I don't paste ye one on ther proboscis, jest fer luck!"

"Yeou ow-ow!" yowled Great Scott. "Mebbe you don't know me. Think I'd better interdoose meself to yer 'quaintance. Come out hyer an' interview yer uncle, Mr. Rag Rags!" and he made another grab at the bummer.

This time he laid hold on his shoulder, and with a jerk, he brought him out to the middle of the floor.

Hearing the loud words, many men had hurried in from the street, and the room was crowded.

As soon as Great Scott and his victim reached the middle of the floor, a ring was formed around them, and there were eager cries to see the battle go on.

"I am ther stuffin' out of ther beggar!" cried one.

"Yank ther rags off him!" shouted another.

"But don't shake 'em hyer, an' ding ther varmin all around," another cautioned, to the amusement of all.

"What do ye mean by 'sultin' me?" cried Great Scott, giving his victim a shake. "What do ye s'pose I'm goin' ter do wi' ye?"

"Be easy with the poor cuss, Scott," pleaded the proprietor of the place in the ragged man's behalf. "You'll kill him ef ye hit him, so let him go with a gentle reminder."

"Don't hit me," whined the man of rags and tatters. "Mebby I was too quick to take 'fense."

This only served to anger the bully the more.

"Not lit ye?" he yelled, swinging his ponderous right fist around and around while he held fast to his victim with his left hand. "I'm goin' ter knock the head clean off ye!"

"Please don't!"

"Ha! ha! ha! Hear ther puppy whine, will ye? Now I'll give ye somethin' to make ye yowl, too!"

With that, he drew back his swinging fist and let go a blow straight at the ragged man's nose, with all the force he could put into it, and the expected result was dreaded.

The actual result, however, was a surprise.

With a simple movement of one of his hands, the bumper brushed aside the blow with ease.

The force of it carried Mr. Scott off his balance, and only for the man of rags he must have fallen to the floor, but the intended victim caught him and held him on his feet.

"What's the matter?" he asked him.

"Now paste him one!" yelled the parrot.

"Let go o' me!" bellowed Great Scott. "I mean ter bu'st yer eyes out."

"Ef it's all the same ter you, I'd ruther ye wouldn't," demurred the man of rags, humbly. "Please let me go, won't ye?"

At the same time one of his own hands was holding the shoulder of the great bull-whacker like a vise, and the clutch fairly made the terror of the town wince with pain.

It began to look as if the man of rags was waking up.

"Climb his necktie, Pete!" piped the parrot. "Comb his ha'r fer him!"

"You bet he jest kin!" assured Pete Parrot, confidently. "He will make him wish his mammy's milk had b'en gin, you kin bet!"

"Take off yer han'!" roared the great one.

"You take off yours!"

"I'll give ye jest one second!"

"Yas, an' I'll give you ther same!"

"Let go, I tell ye!"

"An' I tell you!"

Great Scott began to struggle, now, but he found that somehow he couldn't use himself to any advantage at all.

The other seemed to hold him with ease, for a moment, but finally he let go of him, giving the bully a slight push as he did so that sent him backward to the floor in an undignified attitude.

"Whooop!" from the crowd.

"Scotty is too drunk ter fight!"

"He's fuller'n a tick, he is, an' he had better go take a sleep."

This was not so, for the excitement had greatly cleared the fellow's head, and he was on his feet in a second.

Now he could stand.

"Drunk, am I?" he roared. "I'll show ye how drunk I am, now, you kin bet on et! Somebody speak fer a coffin fer this hyer bundle o'—"

He made a dash at his victim, with the

intention of converting his head into a mass of jelly at one blow, if he could strike hard enough.

He drew back his arm as he sprung forward; then it shot out with a mighty force, and the ragged fellow had made no move whatever to get out of harm's way.

As the fist of the other came at his nose, however, he moved just enough to avoid it, and then something happened, somehow, though no one could tell just how it occurred.

The bumper moved, with a motion akin to lightning, and the next instant Great Scott shot forward, like a bag of wool fired from a catapult, and he went clear over the heads of the crowd and even over the bar, where he came down with a crash that shook the building to its foundation!

And, while the crowd stood gaping, Pete Bourbon coolly left the room, Pete Parrot following him.

CHAPTER XV.

THE MEANING OF A MESSAGE.

DEADWOOD DICK, JUNIOR, had been a quiet observer of all this.

And when Pete Bourbon had gone from the room, he turned to speak to the mayor about him.

The mayor had been by his side only a moment ago, but now he was gone, and Dick could not see him in the crowd.

Timothy McFarrel, the proprietor of the hotel, stood near.

"Mr. Scott ran up against a snag, in that fellow," the young detective, observed.

"He certainly did," the landlord agreed.

"The fellow was not to be judged by his looks, it seems. Never saw the like in my life."

"You are right," McFarrel affirmed.

"That was the greatest feat I ever see in this hyer room, I'm tellin' ye. Wonder who that cuss can be?"

"He's a Hercules in disguise."

"Et certainly looks so."

Just then a young woman elbowed her way through the crowd to where Deadwood Dick stood, and put a bit of paper in his hand.

Dick looked at her inquiringly.

"Who sends this?" Dick asked.

"I don't know."

"How did you know me?"

"You were pointed out to me."

"How—when?"

"Just now, through the window."

"By whom?"

"A woman."

"And you don't know who it was?"

"No."

"Well, that's queer. But, hold on; maybe the missive will explain it."

With that, Dick opened the paper and read it, something of a puzzled look coming into his face as he did so. It ran thus:

"DEADWOOD DICK, JUNIOR:—"

"You want to know who killed Henry Wilkinson. I know, and I will tell you, but I dare not come to you in the camp. Come immediately to Injun Rock—the bearer will direct you, and there I will meet you for ten minutes' talk. I can solve the mystery. Come alone. If any one comes with you, I will have disappeared when you arrive. Stand under the edge of the rock and chirp two or three times like a cricket."

"ONE WHO KNOWS."

"Well, this is passing strange," mused Dick, aloud.

"What is it?" asked McFarrel.

"That, I am not at liberty to disclose," was the reply. "Come, miss," to the girl who had brought the message. "I want a word with you."

"I'm with ye, sport."

Dick moved through the crowd and made his way out of the room.

The girl followed at his heels.

Great Scott had by this time been dragged out from behind the bar, but had not yet come to, though efforts were being made in that direction.

"Well, what is it?" asked the girl, when Dick and she were outside.

"Don't you know what's required of you?" Dick demanded.

"To show you the way to Injun Rock, and these are the directions:

"Go up the gulch here till you pass the second mine plant; there you branch off from the trail into a path to the right, by a clump of mesquite bushes, and follow straight on that path till you come to a big rock on the left, close to the path. That is Injun Rock."

"And did the woman leave any further word for me? Would she allow you to accompany me as guide?"

"No, she wouldn't! She said you was to come alone, or you wouldn't find her there when you got there. What's more, I have to give her a signal whether you are alone or not."

"Well, there is no use my wasting time here with you, then, so I'll be off. Send along your signal that I am alone. If this affair is not regular, they will find they have tackled the wrong man, if they give me half a chance."

With that, Dick set out to obey the summons.

Coming to the second group of mine sheds, he discovered the path as described to him.

Along this path he proceeded, past the clump of mesquite bushes, and finally a big rock loomed up on the left, close to the path, and he slackened his pace and approached it cautiously.

His thoughts had not been idle on the way.

The note he had received was in a woman's hand, there was no doubt about it, and he hardly looked for treachery.

It was quite likely the note meant just what it said, and he was ready to accept any risk for the chance of coming at the truth in the great murder case he was trying to clear up.

He looked at the rock as he drew nearer still, and found that the top of it leaned out toward the path, while its base seemed to recede.

Leaving the path, he stepped under the overhanging ledge and there listened. Not a sound was to be heard, and pausing a few moments he chirped three times as the note had directed.

The instant the last note fell from his lips, something happened.

And it was something in the way of a great surprise.

The detective was suddenly seized by unseen hands, for here it was quite dark, and in spite of his struggles he was overcome and borne to the ground.

"What think you now, Deadwood Dick?" a whispering voice then demanded.

"That you are a set of curs," was the defiant answer.

"That's your opine. Et don't make no difference to us. You are our mutton, an' we ar' goin' to cook ye."

Dick failed to recognize the voice, but made note of the suddenly assumed dialect, which had not been used in the first words spoken.

"What for?" Dick asked, to draw the man out further.

"Because you know too cussed much, that's what! You fell into our trap as nice as ye please."

"And I'll fall out again, if you give me a ghost of a show."

"Which we don't mean ter do."

"Not to be expected of assassins."

"We'll assassin you!"

"I expect nothing else. You are not men, or you would give me a chance for my life."

I will fight all of you, at ten paces with guns."

"Oh, no, thank ye; we know a better way than that."

They were busy binding his hands and feet, while thus talking, and now they proceeded to put a gag in his mouth.

When this had been accomplished, they left him on the ground, and for a moment they held a whispered consultation.

"Well, your doom has been decided," the leader at length announced.

"We ar' goin' to drop you down into a secret hole, which has a rock cover to et that a thousand men couldn't move from the inside, and there we will let you think about the deeds of your life, while you await the coming of death."

Needless to say, their prisoner felt a thrill of horror, at this.

Without more ado, they took their victim up and bore him away, and it could not be doubted but they meant to carry out their threat to the letter.

CHAPTER XVI.

PETE PARROT, PETE BOURBON, AND POLLY.

PERHAPS there is one question that has been recurring to the mind of the reader.

And that question, respecting the doubt that had been raised by the driver of the stage concerning the identity of this young detective.

We would not have this lost sight of, though, without any proof to the contrary, we have still continued calling him Deadwood Dick, and must so continue until such proof is shown.

It need not be denied that now a thrill of fear filled the breast of the prisoner, no matter who he was.

He was carried some distance; then suddenly his captors stopped, and he was laid on the ground.

Near at hand the prisoner noted a big rock, not so big as Injun Rock by any means, but it was a boulder that must have weighed several tons at the least.

Having laid him down, his three captors advanced to this boulder.

They laid hold upon it, all on the same side, and it could be seen that they were exerting their utmost strength.

Presently the boulder, under this pressure, was toppled over, and as if on a hinge, opened just so far and then came to a stop, and scarcely any noise had been made.

A hole was disclosed under it.

The prisoner was now taken up, and carrying him to this hole, his captors let him drop into the black space underneath!

Fortunately for the prisoner, the hole was not a deep one.

He fell to the bottom with a thud, surprised to find that he was not killed, or even much hurt, and then to his ears came the taunting words of his captors, as they laughed at his misery.

"Ha! ha! ha! What do ye think now, Deadwood Dick?" one demanded.

No response, of course.

"Fergot that yer talker was tied," the fellow immediately added in whisper. "But, that don't make no diff. You ar' at the end of your earthly walk now, Deady Richard, and you must know et. This is yer grave, and you ar' dead already to all intents an' purposes. It's a good deal neater 'n to dabble in yer blood, and it's jest as secure. Good night, now, an' sweet repose to ye! Ha! ha! ha!"

The fellow then drew back, and all disappeared.

They had passed around to the other side of the boulder.

Here they applied their strength, as at first, and presently the big stone fell back again into its place.

"Thar, that settles his goose," muttered one, as they walked away.

"You bet et does, pardner," another. "And it adds another mystery to the doin's at Silver Pocket."

"And with Deadwood Dick out of the field, it is all plain sailin'. Who would 'a' thought he could tumble to things the way he seemed to be doin'."

"We'd orter 'a' made him 'splain jest what he did suspect."

"I don't know but you're right, but it is too late now. Well, let's scatter, and every man for himself and the secret for us all. Not a hint what has happened this hour, boys."

"Nary a peep."

They parted company, and the shadows swallowed them.

"Pete Parrot, cuss your contrary old hide, did ye ever see anything quite so cold-blooded as that 'ar?"

So demanded Peter Bourbon, as he poked his head out from a bunch of mesquite, some minutes after the departure of the three assassins, after the heinous deed.

"Darn me ef I ever did," responded Pete Parrot, his head, too, appearing out of the clump, he speaking in the same guarded whisper as the other. "Et was enough ter make a feller's blood run icy in his veins, an' I couldn't hardly help pluggin' 'em fer luck."

"Lord help 'em ef ye had, pardner."

"I reckon they'd 'a' needed His help, fer nothin' on earth could 'a' done 'em the least o' good."

Both laughed.

"But," said Pete, "I'd better let loose my grip on Polly, I reckon, or I will have a dead bird in my pocket 'stead of a live one."

He suited action to the word.

He had been holding tight to the parrot, in order that it might not give away their presence in the bushes.

The next moment there was a great stuttering down in the depths of that pocket, as the parrot struggled to get its breath to the full extent once more, and at the same time express itself forcibly.

And, too, at the same time it was making every effort to get its head out into the air.

"Rot you, Pete!" were the first words made plain. "What did you do that fer?"

The two Petes laughed heartily, at that.

At the same time they were guarded not to speak too loudly, even though they had given the murderers time to get out of hearing.

When Polly had been given sufficient chance to get a fresh supply of air, Pete put her back again into his pocket and secured her there, as he had means of doing when it was necessary.

"Now fer that rock," said Pete, the bummer.

"You bet!"

"Think we kin budge et?"

"We'll turn over ther hull blamed uny-varse, ef we can't, that's all."

"But ther were three of those fellows, an' we are only two. However, hyer goes fer et, anyhow."

They advanced and braced themselves against the boulder as they had witnessed the others doing, and then they exerted their strength to topple it over.

The first time failed.

"We'll have ter draw up our belts a hole tighter, an' try et again," declared the Hercules ragamuffin.

"I reckon you ar' right, pard."

"Well, git ready, an' when you hear me grunt, then do your pootiest."

Taking a good breath each, they exerted their strength, and to their delight the rock moved!

"Once more—heave!" cried Bourbon, and the big boulder fell over to its place.

"That's good enough," spoke the bummer; "fer two men to do what et made three grunt to do, ain't no triffin' job, I kalky-late."

"I reckon you ar' right, pardner. Ef et had been a pound heavier I wouldn't 'a' lifted et, though, an' that's gospel. But, let's see now how deep ther hole is. We know et can't be deep."

"Right you ar'. Ef we hadn't been 'sured' by their words that they didn't mean ter kill the feller, thar would hev been a scrimmage hyer, I reckon."

"You kin bet your pile on et."

"Hillo down thar!"

So called Pete Parrot, but not loudly.

A moan was heard in response, and it was not far away.

"Thar he is, pard!" said Pete. "One of us will have ter go down there."

"An' we ain't got no rope. But, that don't matter, we'll cut a saplin' an' make use o' that."

"You bet! What you can't think of ain't worth mentionin', pardner."

"Never mind any of that, now, Pete."

"Jes' so."

Pete Bourbon had taken his knife from his pocket, and, stepping into a clump of young trees he selected one for his purpose, and set about cutting it.

This was speedily accomplished, and as soon as it was done he returned with it to where Pete Parrot was waiting, trimming off the limbs as he advanced, and in a few minutes he had quite a stick in hand.

This he dropped into the hole, holding it by the large end, and Pete Parrot laid hold upon it and quickly descended to the bottom.

It was but the work of a moment to free the prisoner, and both climbed out of the pit.

Deadwood Dick had another chance!

CHAPTER XVII.

DEADWOOD DICK A PRISONER.

"WELL, Deadwood Dick, et would look as ef ye had had a mighty clus call, et would, by tarnel!" exclaimed Bourbon.

"And it would have been a fatal one, my friend, if you and your pard had not come to my rescue," Dick answered. "How came you here? How came you to get on track of their infamous work?"

A cue for the reader; let him take it.

"I'll tell ye," spoke up Pete Parrot. "We have been doin' a leetle detective work ourselves, on this case, Deadwood Dick, and we had our eyes on the p'izen critters and knowed what they was up to. Ef they had set out to kill ye outright, thar would hev been a scrimmage, an' we would have been in et."

"Then I owe my life to you, and let me thank you."

"Don't mention et."

"You say you have been playing the detective?"

"Jes' so."

"Well, what have you discovered?"

"That's tellin'," spoke up Bourbon. "We have had our eyes and ears open wide, though, an' we have picked up some p'int."

"You think Pat Griffin is guilty?"

"No more'n you ar' pard."

"Glad to hear you say that. I know he is innocent, but the man who did kill Wilkinson tried to put the crime on him."

"We ain't so sure o' that 'ar," disputed the bummer. "'caus' the facts don't tally to that end. Ther man what robbed ther safe tried ter put that job on Griffin, though."

"Ha! then you think there were two?"

"Sure of et, pardner! Two crimes an' two men what done 'em. That's ther way et stands in our kalkylashuns. But, seein' as you ar' Deadwood Dick, we stand ready to be corrected."

"Well, do you think that young woman gambler killed Wilkinson, then?"

"Not a bit of et, pardner! She hadn't nothin' ter do with et."

"Well, then, who?"

"That remains ter be seen. Et sartainly"

wasn't me, an' et as sartainly wasn't you. That murder is a wuss puzzle than the robbery."

"Then you know who did the robbery?"

"Perfectly well. Et was no other than Yuma Dodd, a chap you have heard tell on. An' he ain't a thousand miles away from ther scene of action now, either."

"Who, then, is Yuma Dodd?"

"Ain't you onto him yit, Deadwood Dick?"

"I confess that I am not. I have not been long at work, you are aware."

"Neither hev we, pardner. But, thar is another one figgerin' heavy in ther game."

"You refer to the woman who came by the stage?"

"Ther same."

"Well, what do you think of her?"

"We hed ruther that you would tell us what you think of that critter."

"I will do so, then. She is a fraud from the ground up, and you can rely on it. I'm sure of what I say."

"Glad ter know et, Deadwood Dick. We thought ef anybody had p'int on her, et was you, an' we was waitin' to git a chance to put that 'ar question to ye."

"You may rely on it."

"So ye said. Now, Deadwood Dick, what do you mean ter do next?"

"I hardly know, my friends."

"You know your life ain't w'ith a pinch o' snuff hyer in this hard hole, now. They ar' onto you."

"It would seem so."

"It is the fact. They didn't think you would be so durn smart after 'em as you aire, an' they ar' 'fraid of ye."

"Whom do you mean by they?"

"Why, Yuma Dodd, ther murderer, an' the rest of 'em."

"Well, but they are getting scared before they are hurt. I have not found the murderer yet."

"And you didn't know thar had been two fingers in ther pie?"

"I did not, sir."

"And you have no one in sight as ther right party, eh?"

"I confess that I have not. You see, as I said, I have not been long at work on the case."

"Well, you have done all that's necessary, pardner."

"What do you mean?"

"We mean that you ar' done."

"I fail to understand what you are coming at, my friends."

"Wull, then, you ar' our prisoner. Kin ye git onto that without a pair o' stilts?"

Deadwood Dick looked from one to the other in amazement.

"That's ther gospel of et," said Pete Parrot. "We hev taken et into our old heads to finish up this hyer job ourselves."

"Yes, but, by what right do you presume to arrest me?"

"Wull, we presume ter do et by the right o' might, fer one thing," Pete retorted. "We hev had our eyes on you, an' that's how we kem to save yer life."

"But, you don't hold me guilty of either of these crimes?"

"You! Lor' bless ye, pardner, haven't we said so? What we ar' goin' ter do is arrest ye to take keer of ye."

"Are you a pair of harmless lunatics? Have you arrived at the conclusion that Deadwood Dick is no longer capable of taking care of himself?"

"That is jest about the ticket, and we propose puttin' you in a safe place till you are wanted, when we will fetch ye out to ther undoin' of ther hyeners."

"Do you think this is using me just on the square? Don't you think you are rash?"

"Not as rash as you would be ef we let you have your own way. You would be as stiff as Henry Wilkinson, before ther sun rises again, ef Silver Pocket learned you had escaped!"

"Well, I protest, and I'm going to make a stand fer my—"

"Mebby you ar', but you ar' too slow about et, as you see," cried bummer Pete, cutting him short, for Dick had tried to draw a gun, but, quicker than thought had the ragged fellow whipped out a fiver and thrust it under his nose.

"Et won't work, ye see," Bourbon decided. "You ar' our chicken, an' we ar' goin' to take keer of ye. Et won't do ye no good ter kick, so don't try et on. You will come wi' us."

"But, there is one favor I must ask—and that is that you will allow me to attend the funeral of Henry Wilkinson."

"You'll be thar, pardner, an' don't ye forget et. Now, will ye go along in peace, or must we tie yer hands?"

"I'll go quietly."

"As we thought. We know whar thar is a cabin that ain't in use, an' will take ye thar."

"And what then?"

"A solid talk. By addin' what you know to what we know, this mystery we'll be on-locked jest like A B C."

"If that is your object, I fall in with your plans. I will go with you readily, for I begin to see something of another mystery clearing up, and it is a wonder I did not think of it before."

"No need to mention et, pardner. Come along."

The trio set forth, and in due time arrived at a deserted cabin in a lonely spot, where they held a long and earnest consultation. At the end of their talk, Pete Parrot and the other Pete returned to the camp, leaving Deadwood Dick there a willing prisoner.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MESSAGE FROM THE MISSING.

On the following morning there was new excitement in the camp of Silver Pocket.

The great detective was missing, and no trace of him could be found. The mayor was making anxious inquiries everywhere.

At length Tim McFarrel fell in with the mayor, and being asked, related the circumstance of the note he had seen the detective receive at the hands of the young woman.

The young woman, known as Bad Mag, was looked up, and the mayor questioned her in a sharp manner, in the presence of others.

"You delivered a note to Deadwood Dick last night, Mag?"

"Yes; what of et?"

"Maybe a good deal. Who was that note from?"

"A woman paid me to take it to the fellow."

"What woman?"

"Don't know; a stranger here."

"Well, what more do you know about it, Mag? Tell me all you can, for there is something mysterious about all this."

"I don't know nothin' more about it, Ted Talbot, and I don't mean to waste time and breath answering your questions unless there is somethin' in it. I was paid to hand the note to him, and that was all."

"And you didn't read the note?"

"No; of course I didn't!"

"Well, one more, Mag, and I won't trouble you any further. Did you pay any attention to which way the man went?"

"No, I didn't! That was none of my business!"

That settled it, and the mayor and those with him had to retreat with their curiosity unsatisfied.

They were proceeding from the shanty of Bad Mag to the Spread Eagle, when they were confronted in the street by the ragged stranger, Bourbon Pete.

"Hillo, maycr!" he greeted.

"Well, what do you want?"

"I hev been lookin' all over fer you, that's all."

"Lookin' for me?"

"Jes' so."

"Well, here I am. What is it?"

"Was told ter hand this note ter you an' nobody else, that's all."

"Then why in thunder didn't you hand it, without all this parley? Give it here, before I kick a hole in you."

"Ye might never get et, if I kept et fer that to happen."

"Don't be too sure."

Just then up came Great Scott.

"Hello, hyer ye be, hey?" he cried, seeing Pete Bourbon. "You ar' jest the critter I am gunnin' fer."

"You want me?"

"I do, you bet! Git out yer gun and pick out a soft place to fall on. I'll pay you up for last night. No ornery beggar is going to come here and upset me when I had a jag on without gettin' it in the neck!"

"Say, hev you counted all ther consequences of sech rashness on your part?" mildly inquired the ragged fellow. "I am chain lightnin' on ther shoot, an' I opine I could convert you into a porous plaster before ye could tell which end was up. Better drive slow over dangerous places."

"Confound you! do you mean to defy me?"

"Wouldn't think of doin' et, Ginerel Scott!"

"Then what do ye call et?"

"Givin' ye fair warnin', that is all. Ar' ye sober an' straight now?"

"Yes, and for two pins I would knock the face off the front side of your head for you, too."

"Ef you think you can do et, sail in, but I reckon you will think you ar' as full as a tick before I git done with ye, that's all. Now, put up or shut up, an' that right quick."

"Sock et to 'em!" cried the parrot, on the shoulder of Pete Parrot, who just then came up.

"Why, confound your gall!" cried Scott, springing forward with his arm ready for business. "Take that, cuss ye, fer yer sass, an' mebbey et will—"

Biff!

Great Scott struck a blow as he was speaking, but, it was easily parried, and the right fist of the bummer took him squarely between the eyes.

Down he went all in a heap, insensible, and those who had witnessed the blow drew back in affright from the man who had struck it. There was more beneath all these rags than any one would have supposed.

"Guess he don't want any more jest now," Bourbon Pete coolly observed. "When he comes to, ef he makes any inquiries about me, tell him to come to ther captain's office an' I'll tend to him. Told him ter look out he didn't fetch up ergainst a snag, but he—"

"Here! what's this mean?"

The mayor had been deaf to all, reading the message he had just received, but he now came out of his dream, as it were, and seeing what had been done, gave voice to the words quoted.

"Et means that this hyer galoot tried ter climb up my back, an' I wouldn't have et that way, that's all," answered the man of dilapidated vestments.

"Who the deuce are you, anyhow?"

"Pete Bourbon, at your service."

"Well, who handed you this note?"

"That feller called Deadwood Dick."

"Where is he now?"

"He's some'rs around, I kalkylate," and the man of rags looked up the street and down, as if to find him.

"I dunno whar he is now," he said.

"Must be at ther hotel, I reckon."

"Then why should he send a note like this? Why didn't he come himself? I fail to see what it means."

"You'll have to ask him, boss."

"What's the message?" asked Tim McFarrel.

"Why, he tells me to have ther funeral of Wilkinson put off till this afternoon, but to have the hearing of them two wimmin at once, an' he will be on hand with 'portant evidence."

"Then what's ther matter with doin' et?"

"Nothing; we'll attend to it immediately."

"That all he has ter say?"

"No, he wants us to have Pat Griffin out, too, for a hearing. He thinks he kin fasten the crime where it belongs, now."

"Read ther note," called out one man.

"All right, hyer goes:

"MAYOR TALBOT:—

"Please have the funeral of Wilkinson put off until this afternoon, and have the hearing of the two women at once. I will be on hand with important evidence. Also have Pat Griffin at the hearing, and I will put the crime where it belongs. I have been working things a little on the quiet, and think I have got matters straightened out. Have Griffin well guarded.

"DEADWOOD DICK, JR."

"Bully fer Deadwood Dick!"

"That's what we all say. Bully fer ther detective!"

"He must 'a' got ther thing fast onty Pat Griffin, from ther tone of his letter."

"You bet!"

"An' he must want ther guard to prevent the crowd from hangin' him," chipped in the bum. "Ef ye want my services, mayor, all ye have got ter do is swear me in as a special officer, an' I'll undertake to do ther hull job alone. What say?"

"What job? hangin' Pat?"

"No, no; protectin' him from ther mob."

"I guess we kin take keer of et, without any of your help."

"All right; that settles et; I don't like to chip in whar I am not wanted. Come, Peter, let's go drown our sorrows."

"Don't mind ef I do, about this time o' day," assented Pete Parrot. "Give me yer arm, pardner, an' we'll go an' do et all alone by ourselves, this hyer deal."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE GRAND EXPOSE.

WITHIN an hour Ted Talbot had made a platform on the Plaza before the hotel and the Exchange.

The word had been passed along, and the entire population of the camp was on hand to see and hear. Opinion was divided concerning Pat Griffin.

When all was ready, he was brought forth from the calaboose, and the two women rivals were invited to places on the platform. A jury was chosen, and a level-headed man was made judge.

At the last moment, Deadwood Dick made his appearance.

He was not alone.

He had a prisoner, and that prisoner was Tom Hoyt, the man who had taken Pat Griffin's place in the Exchange.

Hoyt was handcuffed and gagged, a strange circumstance as all thought it, but no one offered any comments aloud. The detective seated him, and that done, addressed the throng.

"Citizens of Silver Pocket," he spoke, "before we proceed further, there are two men in this crowd whose arrest I must order, and I rely upon you to make them prisoners. One is known among you as Bob Scott, or 'Great Scott,' and the other is your worthy mayor, Ted Talbot!"

Had a bomb burst there and then it could not have occasioned greater excitement.

The mayor and Great Scott turned deathly pale, but, before either could speak or make any move to resist, they were in the hands of men who had been waiting for the order.

One of these men was Pete Parrot and the other was Pete Bourbon.

"No ye don't, boss!" cried the latter, as the mayor's hand sought his hip. "I will

take keer of you, jest as I said I would. None of yer cuttin' up, now, or I shell hev to 'ply a dose of muscle to ye."

"Hold hard hyer!" Pete Parrot was at the same time exclaiming, having laid hold upon Great Scott from behind, where he had him safely at an advantage. "Ef ye don't, by ther great Ginerall Scott ye read about ef I don't make ye wish yer mammy's milk had been *aqua fortis*!"

And here was another surprise right on top of the first!

Who and what were these two fellows that they were so promptly on hand to do the bidding of Deadwood Dick?

Could it be that they were pards of his, in disguise, who had come with him and thus taken part in the affair of ferreting out the mystery of the murder?

The mayor, Great Scott, and another in the crowd, had paled at the reappearance of Dick, who had been disposed of, as we have seen, but now, at their arrest, their knees fairly shook under them.

"What shall we do with 'em?" asked Bourbon.

"Bring them right up here, sir," was the answer, "where all may see them."

The respectful way in which he spoke to the seeming bummer was remarked by all with surprise.

The two Petes marched their prisoners around and up to the floor of the platform, where they were bound the same as Griffin and Tom Hoyt.

They were not the only pale ones present; the two women were now as pale!

"And now again, citizens of Silver Pocket," addressed the detective, "allow me to spring yet another surprise upon you. Let me now invite the genuine Deadwood Dick, Junior, to step forward and take charge of this matter—for I am not he; my name is Henry—"

"Never mind your name just yet!" interposed Pete Bourbon, rising and stepping to the edge of the platform. "Citizens," removing his bushy hair and beard with one sweep of the hand, "I am the man whose name you have just heard mentioned—Deadwood Dick, Junior. This gentleman has been masquerading in my personality for a time—for which I have pardoned him!"

The crowd was too amazed to say anything yet.

Deadwood Dick continued:

"Myself and pard came here by chance, on our way down to Yuma. Learning of this murder mystery, and that some one was here wearing my name, we decided to take a hand in the game on the quiet. We did so, and have solved the mystery, besides saving the life of the false Deadwood Dick—whom the guilty ones tried to put out of the way because they found they could not blind him as easily as they had hoped to do. They had a real detective to buck against.

"The murderer of Henry Wilkinson was no other than Mayor Talbot—No use, my friend, we have got the dead wood on you, hard! I say it was Ted Talbot who killed the man, as I am prepared to prove. It was a well-laid scheme, by which this woman, in it with Talbot, was to come in at the right time and set up her claim as the widow of the dead man. It was a pretty scheme and well worked, but it has come to an unexpected and unfortunate ending for them. Talbot gained entrance into the room by a door of which he had learned the secret from Fairy Frank.

"It was not the mayor who robbed the safe, however, for that was a separate job altogether. That was done by Yuma Dodd, and this man known to you as Tom Hoyt is the person. Release him from the gag, Pete! He, too, had learned the secret from the young woman, Fairy Frank, who was false to the trust Wilkinson reposed in her. He, to put the crime upon Pat Griffin, arranged the safe so that it would look as if Griffin

had done the deed. And, too, Talbot had cut a button from Griffin's coat and left it in the room where the murder was done! But, these things were for the most part worked out by this gentleman."

He indicated the man who had been wearing his name.

"Let me now introduce him," Dick continued. "Gentlemen, this is Henry Wilkinson Junior, who came here to visit his father, after many years of separation, only to find him dead. He is a detective himself, in one of our Eastern cities, and one of no mean ability. He has letters from his father ample to prove his claim. He of course knew his father had neither wife nor daughter, and that the claims of both these women were as false as their hearts, and so he was in position to handle the case even better than I could have done myself. He had heard of me, as he explains to me, and when your Great Scott met him in the mountains the thought came to him to use my name and identity, and he did so.

"Pat Griffin is no more guilty in either matter than am I myself. As for Fairy Frank, she is guilty only of trying to impose upon you that she is the daughter of the murdered man. Her name happens to be Scott, and she is the daughter of Great Scott. This accounts for the fact that he was on her side and against the other woman, the same as other facts account for Talbot's being against Fairy Frank. Yuma Dodd had been worming himself into the regard of Pat Griffin for some time, to accomplish his purpose of robbing the office, and he did it on the same fatal night that Talbot killed the banker. You know he was absent that night, or claimed to have been—that was all prearranged for effect. Really he was out of town disposing of his plunder, but we have found the hiding-place of it and have recovered it all. And now for the direct proofs of all I have said."

The proofs were presented, the whole matter was gone over at great length, and not a single point was left in doubt or unexplained.

The blood-mark on the door, and on the paper found in the safe, bearing the imprint of a thumb, was examined minutely, and it was proven that Talbot's thumb had made the marks.

Here, then, something new came to light, and it came out that he and Yuma Dodd had really worked the thing together; and more, that Yuma Dodd, or Tom Hoyt, was in reality no other than Tom Talbot, the mayor's own son! The jury did not have to seek further evidence.

When Dick had done, finally, the crowd broke into a cheer that could have been heard a mile.

There was a mad cry for a lynching.

This, however, would not be allowed, and after some trouble all the prisoners, save Griffin, were lodged in the lock-up.

In the afternoon came the funeral of the murdered man, when his son took full charge of everything, having established his claim beyond any question—Deadwood Dick having aided him to do so.

There was a big time at Silver Pocket that night.

The camp's denizens could not show Deadwood Dick honor enough, and there was a big jubilee, but in which the banker's son took no part. The young man really mourned for his father, for there had been a strong affection between father and son.

What more needs be said?

The guilty ones received their reward, the mayor paying the penalty with his life. Others are languishing in the terrible Arizona Penitentiary.

And Deadwood Dick and his pard? They went on their way. So, for the present, we take leave of them, brave pards and true as steel.

THE END.

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